



The House of the Seven Gabblers

Nina Larrey Duryea



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The HOUSE *of*
THE SEVEN GABBLERS



“I say, old chap, anybody at home?”

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The HOUSE *of*
THE SEVEN GABBLERS

BY
NINA LARREY DURYEA



ILLUSTRATED BY
HERMANN HEYER

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TO
MY MOTHER

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The HOUSE *of* THE SEVEN GABBLERS

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE AND THE GABBLERS

PASCAL once said that if Cleopatra's nose had been a little shorter the history of the world might have been changed. Thus are great events shaped by trifles.

Had I been an instant later in turning the corner of the Rue de la Paix that June afternoon, this history of the eventful months passed in the Château de Pelouse would never have been chronicled.

Dodging an automobile, I ran against Margaret Chanler, who, with her usual indifference to surroundings, was piloting an old woman across the bewildering thoroughfare. Safely landed on the sidewalk, I claimed her for a talk

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and tea at the Ritz; and, despite her protests, firmly directed her toward that Mecca of fashion.

"Never mind your clothes," I cried. "It is an age since we met, and I have a thousand things to ask and tell."

We reached the hotel garden, where, beneath huge scarlet umbrellas, one's friendly enemies dissect buttered toast and reputations with well-bred composure and the moral support of irreproachable toilettes. The maître d'hôtel whisked from a table a card marked "Reserved," bearing the name of a duchess, and ensconced us in my favorite corner. Conscientious Margaret demurred as we usurped the great one's table.

"Don't you fret," I said. "She is the meanest woman in Europe, and Alphonse prefers American duchesses. Now tell me everything. What are you doing here? Painting more portraits of Crowned Heads?"

Margaret twitched her glasses from her eyes.

"Not this time," she said, smiling. "Wisconsin has commissioned me to decorate the dome of its new Public Library, and I'm going to work as soon as I get settled."

"Settled where?"

"In the Château de Pelouse, which old Countess d'Eeyleau has loaned me, and which has been untenanted for years. It was built by Louis XIV., who hunted wild boars in its park. I'll live in a corner of it with a couple of servants, and it will be quiet, heavenly and cheap."

With an inward doubt as to anything cheap being heavenly, I heaved an envious sigh.

"Oh, you lucky creature!" I cried. "It sounds too delightful. I am so woefully tired of my kind of life. It is only pleasure—never real interest or peace. Really, my boy Alwyn is my sole excuse for living."

"You are a spoiled child of fortune," said Margaret, "to whom the gods have been too kind. As the French say, 'Le bonheur, c'est d'être riche, jeune et veuve,' yet you complain."

As she spoke, I had an inspiration.

"Margaret!" I exclaimed. "Let us come to your château, and lead the simple life."

Margaret threw up both hands in horrified denial.

"You! Twenty miles from a porcelain tub and a Marcel wave. Out upon you!"

But the idea had seized upon my imagination,

and I had early acquired the art of getting my own way.

"You dear old Margaret," I wheedled, "you mustn't refuse. I'll be so good! If we are a nuisance, you can send us away."

My intelligent friend shook her head.

"You would be having smart people out from Paris; you'd want to furbish things up and give dinner parties."

But I waved aside such feeble objections.

"It is no use," I laughed, "for I'm coming. We'll pay our share strictly, and I promise to behave like a Quaker from Philadelphia. But good gracious! There is Lillian! I forgot all about her."

"Who and what is Lillian?"

"She is my cousin, a charming young girl from Bridgeport, Massachusetts. She is an orphan, and has been brought up by a step-aunt who has white eyelashes, a thin, red nose and a thin, red temper. Lillian is a dear, but Bridgeport and Browning Clubs were rapidly turning her into dry-rot. So I brought her over here to see something of 'the world, the flesh and the devil.' While she dutifully tries to enjoy herself, she is a

square peg in a round hole. She won't wear corsets, and considers a powder-puff synonymous with—vice!"

"What a combination, you and she!" laughed Margaret.

"Lillian will consider your château as a providential escape from the Powers of Evil. Yes! we will come, and my little maid, Henriette, shall help with housework. With her waist of seventeen inches, and the face of a wax doll, my life has been made a burden, because every male menial pursued her. Yes! your hospitable roof will prove our haven."

Margaret fell back in her chair, despairing resignation depicted on her countenance.

"You speak of *my* hospitable roof. It isn't mine, and I am not aware of having urged you, your cousin and your maid to come. But you know I love you too dearly to refuse. If you can stand it I can. The countess told me to fill the house if I liked."

"So it is agreed!" I cried, clapping my hands. "When do we go, and how do we get there?"

"Don't gallop, my dear. Am not there myself

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yet. The house has to be cleaned and provisions ordered."

"Have you servants?"

"Two. Cook and chambermaid. The former is a treasure, Hildegarde by name, German by birth."

"Had she good references?"

"References!" Margaret looked dazed. "I never thought of references. She has a good face, doesn't want beer, and can make American doughnuts."

"And you don't know one single thing about her?"

"Of course not. What should I know of a young woman from Bruenundend, Germany? She doesn't know anything about us, either."

"Well, I hope she won't murder us in our beds. How about the housemaid?"

"She is the postman's niece, Marie by name, and a bit fat, but not inexperienced, having begun as *femme de chambre*, at the age of ten, to the — cow!"

"That sounds promising," I said. "She should have acquired some milk of human kindness, at

least. But I want to help do things. Let me attend to ordering groceries."

"Very well. I'll leave that to you. Don't forget salt, or that we are miles from a lemon."

A couple of hours later I broached the subject of our changed plans to Lillian and Henriette. I found the former writing her diary conscientiously in my *salon*, a vision of slender grace in her dinner gown. Her blond head, in the lamplight, was that of a smartly coiffed saint. A look of unfeigned and joyful relief gladdened her upturned face at the news.

"How perfect!" she cried, "to get away from these horrid Latins and their silly little excitements."

Henriette paled with the shock.

"It will ruin Madame's complexion!" she wailed. "And what shall we do with Madame's new and ravishing toilettes?"

I locked her out, and Lillian and I fell to work on the grocery list. She showed a knowledge worthy of her Massachusetts training. We made a list of edibles fit to stock an hotel, and then trembled for fear that essentials were forgotten.

The following Thursday we met Margaret at

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the Gare du Nord. She was guarded by the "Treasure," whose honest, intelligent face explained Margaret's indifference regarding references. Truth to tell, she looked so superior, one doubted her capacity as a cook.

As we got our tickets, Lillian suddenly turned to me.

"Did you remember the candles?"

I stared at her with horror. "Candles!" The blood dyed my face as I felt their eyes upon me. I could have cried with mortification, having tried so hard to prove myself practical and efficient.

"Never mind," said Margaret kindly, "we can see by firelight."

As she spoke I saw her face slowly change to an expression of horror. Her lips parted, but no word came.

"What is it?" I cried, fear clutching my heart.

Margaret turned a hunted gaze upon us.

"The coal!" she gasped. "I forgot it."

We stood there, gaping at each other. We were to be without light or fire. What was to be done? Then the "Treasure" spoke, and we lis-

tened to the first of many words of wisdom destined to fall from her lips.

"It matters not. If Madame will permit, I will 'phone from here to have them sent out tomorrow, and for to-night I will break up grocery cases for fuel, and for lights I will place bits of cotton in salad oil."

Margaret sighed with relief, and gazed at us with pride, as though to say:

"I may have forgotten coal, but have I not supplied my household with what is above rubies?"

After an hour's ride through rain-soaked country, Margaret announced that we were—"there!" On a soggy platform, two officials loomed, evidently amazed that the strangers from the *pays sauvage* were not attired in paint and feathers. At the further end, piled mountain-high, were our trunks, barrels, boxes, surmounted by Margaret's parrot, Aristotle, in his cage, screaming, "Go to the devil!" rapidly and with eloquence. Hildegard, by some occult power, animated the officials, and directed their efforts toward the transference of ourselves and chattels to the wagons and carriages on the further side of the station.

These "carriages" proved to be surprising

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vehicles of extraordinary height, mounted on two wheels, and covered by what looked like gigantic clothes-baskets turned upside down. Only one step intervened between ground and seats, and as I stood hesitating, wondering if wings were supplied with this conveyance, I found myself grasped by mighty arms and thrust into the black cavern of its interior. Alwyn shinned up the dashboard, and Margaret followed without aid, being naturally lofty physically as morally. Hildegarde disappeared into the other wheeled cavern with Henriette, the parrot, and other odds and ends.

Off we went. Never will that drive fade from my memory—the bone-racking jolts; the fresh sweetness of the rain-wet air; the mystery and beauty of gray skies, misty spaces of glade, and massy wood which filled the horizon. For three miles we rattled along the stone-paved “Route Nationale,” bordered by its usual mathematically planted trees. Then suddenly we turned and plunged into a narrow road which appeared to be a succession of pits and swamps. Dense woods were on either side, their branches whipping our reversed clothes-baskets as we wobbled and jog-

gled along. Then out again on a road worthy of Hyde Park, winding through peaceful fields, unfenced and cultivated like one vast garden. At last, in the twilight, lights glimmered, and Margaret again announced that we were—"there!"

I craned my neck for a glimpse of the *château*. We were rattling down a narrow, cobbled street, between two rows of ugly, little gray houses. Not a flower or bit of garden brightened their sordidness.

"We can't be—there," I cried. "Where is your *château*?"

"But we are!" Margaret insisted, as we stopped before a long stone wall and a worm-eaten plank gate set in an arch. My heart dropped down into my boots with a thump. Our driver descended with elephantine dignity and battered at the gate, which presently opened inward. A tall, thin figure flattened itself against the wall as we lurched through, his wooden *sabots* clattering after, as we passed into a great, stone-paved court, where giant trees loomed. Dim walls surrounded it on three sides. Friendly lights twinkled from the lower stories.

"Candles!" I murmured in Margaret's ear as

a door on the left flew open, glimpsing a huge kitchen, where copper pans glowed from white walls, and crowding faces filled the doorway.

"Who are all those people?" I demanded.

"Goodness knows; I don't," Margaret replied, as we climbed stiffly down into the circle of light.

I recognized the former "*femme de chambre* to the cow" immediately, short, fresh-checked, in white cap and apron, who stolidly removed packages from our hands as though we were incompetent children. She was the only one who kept her mouth shut. Then a slender figure, decorously clad in a black frock-coat, detached itself and came forward, bowing with perfect courtesy.

"I beg leave to present myself, Mesdames—Monsieur Leamau, the schoolmaster. I live across the way, and this is my wife. We thought we might be of some use at so eventful a moment, and pray you to command us."

We expressed our thanks, and then the others were presented: the postmaster and his wife; a Madame Philon, whose social status remained unexplained; the gardener, Isidore, his wife, and

three sons, with faces like intelligent weasels. Isidore was plainly a person of distinction, having been sole resident of the domain for thirty years, and as much a part of the château as its roofs and chimneys. Authority was written on his brow, and wisdom gleamed from his little black eyes. Our guests finally departed with many protestations of welcome, and we entered the house by a door on the opposite side of the court.

The rain had ceased, and a faint moon silvered the gray walls, over which rose-vines clambered to the eaves. The architecture was noble in its simplicity. On one side the belfry of the private chapel shot its slender length into the deep vault above, swathed in wistaria bloom.

We entered the hall, paved with black and white marble, which Alwyn announced excellent for "hop-scotch." Armored figures filled the corners, and splendid tapestries covered the walls. At the opposite end a double door opened on the "*perron*," from which a double, stone staircase descended to the park. Curiosity urged us to at once investigate the house, but beauty held us silent on the *perron*.

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Before us lay a lawn of many acres sloping toward a dark belt of wood. Peace brooded there with folded wings. One felt the glory of tradition; the richness of association which breathed, a living presence there, where others had lived and passed on, for many generations.

Margaret's arm lay about my shoulder, and her quiet voice broke the spell of silence.

"You have sighed for peace, dear. You find it here."

"It certainly is here," I replied. "We are at last in a corner of the world where nothing has happened for a hundred years, or will happen for many more. We will live sane lives, without events or emotions. We will rise and lie down in calmness of spirit, and the days will glide by tranquilly as yonder cloud across the moon, undisturbed by the clang of the world."

Thus did I blindly prophesy.

"*À propos* of clangs," said Margaret, rudely interrupting my poetic flight, "there seems to be considerable somewhere within. Perhaps we had better investigate."

We followed the sound of hammers through the hall, and down a long corridor to a room op-



“ Lillian, with a sheet draped about her elegant person . . .
checked off lists with practical efficiency.”

posite the kitchen, whence issued the clatter. We found Isidore knocking staves off barrels with Titanic fury, while Hildegarde, with her hat cocked over one eye, heaped bedding, groceries, pots and pans in piles for distribution. Lillian, with a sheet draped about her elegant person, and bits of excelsior clinging to her hair, checked off lists with practical efficiency.

Linen and blankets were thrust upon us, and one of the boys led the way upstairs with a bit of candle, stuck in a bottle.

Oh! those rooms, where "old faces glimmered through the doors, old footsteps trod the upper floors!" I couldn't bring myself to decide in which one to sleep. Alwyn recalled the example of the "Three Bears," and suggested trying each in turn; but Margaret, having decided on rooms above the *perron*, facing the park, Alwyn and I settled on a suite at the end, whose windows opened on the "Linden Walk," a wonderful avenue of trees like an endless Gothic arch, which led from the house into mystery beyond. The bed in my room was in an alcove on a dais, with a dear fence around it, and a gate by which to enter. The walls were of exquisitely carved oak,

painted white, and the parquet floor was mellow with age. Between my room and Alwyn's was a round hole cut through the wall, without glass or curtain, which puzzled us, until Margaret explained the mystery; that it was to pass one's head through to be powdered on the other side, that one's clothes might not be powdered, also. Beyond, in Lillian's room, we found the same contrivance.

For Alwyn's bed, Hildegarde discovered in the granary (as *château* attics are called) an adorable crib, with angels two feet high at the corners.

At last the upper rooms were in a semblance of order, and we became conscious of appetites and that housework was more conducive to hunger than a ten-mile canter. So we descended to set the table. The dining-room ran the full width of the house, one end opening on the court, the other toward the park, a vision of beauty on either hand. A splendid golden Buddha filled one corner of the room, his enigmatical eyes following our movements as though in contemptuous pity for such enthusiasm.

Our first meal was enjoyed with gusto, in spite

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of the fact that Marie knew as little of serving as she did of Greek. Afterward we investigated the *salons*: one, a superb room, fully forty feet square, facing the Linden Walk. Its walls were of white, carved oak; its huge fireplace looked like a cavern. As Margaret said, "It was all of noble lines."

"But we can't sit down on noble lines," I remarked, as it dawned upon us that the room contained nothing but a magnificent crystal chandelier and some flower-pots. Margaret ran to the window and peered out.

"Yes! it is north!" she cried. "This shall be my studio, and the Immortals shall descend to my canvas here, from Olympus."

Alwyn shouted with glee: "And I'll roller-skate while you paint."

At last it was bedtime, and we mounted to our rooms, to find them brilliantly illuminated with candles. Isidore, busy unstrapping trunks, explained that they were the gift of Madame Philon.

"Who is Madame Philon?" asked Lillian.

Isidore appeared somewhat embarrassed, but explained that she was the wife of the Mayor's



“‘And I’ll roller-skate while you paint.’”

head farmer, adding that she had no personal occupation.

“A Mayor!” I exclaimed.

“But yes, Madame; of an excellence—! He and his wife live against the corner of your park walls. They are very rich—of millions!”

“What disaster!” sighed Margaret. “We don’t want anyone like that around. We’ll have to live up to ’em. What does the Mayoress think of our advent?”

Isidore hesitated.

“Not meaning to be bold, Madame, she fancies Americans are savage, and has had double locks put on all their doors and windows. The Mayor’s wife is a severe and proper person, being of so exalted a position, and most pious. The Mayor, he is of a more lively taste, and has respect for but two things—his God and his honorable wife.”

With bows worthy of Chesterfield, Isidore backed from the room. The vision of this perfect Mayoress had dampened our spirits, and we bade one another good-night with chastened spirits.

Alwyn, who should have been in bed long before, was still very much awake, and when his “nightie” had been buttoned, climbed to my lap. We put out the candles and sat before the open window. We were so near, so dear, each to the other. That inner life, which is hidden in the sanctuary of every one’s soul, was only shared with each other.

We sat in silence, listening to mysterious voices of the night. At the foot of the lawn lay the forest, massy purple against the star-strewn can-

opy of sky—a region of alluring mystery, where wild creatures prowled, birds slept among shadows, and leaves rested motionless in moonlit glades. In the deep vault above, the moon was dropping down over the edge of the world. It seemed as though we had reached another planet, hung far in space, a place of arrested movement and tranquil joys. Something rose in my heart and stretched its wings. Liberty beckoned my tired spirit to leave hampering conditions for wider life, where convention no longer restricted, and ideals became realized.

The brown head had grown heavy. Tired eyelids were closed. I carried my precious burden to the bed where the carved angels kept watch above innocent slumber. A benison seemed to breathe forth in the silence. I knelt with my cheek against the childish hand and mutely aspired toward that Presence which hallowed the quiet room.

CHAPTER II

MAID TO ORDER

THAT "Dear" should never be awakened, unless for serious reasons, was a law which Alwyn had been trained to observe, but with a joyous summer world beckoning, and a riot of color, scent and sound outside, my son's self-control had evidently vanished. I was far away in dreamland when I heard a small voice talking not *to* but *at* me, and hazily recognized garbled quotations from the "Sleeping Beauty."

"Behold, how she is fair!" my son was murmuring impersonally. "How still she lies, and yet methinks life hides beneath those lids. I love her! Her lips will I kiss to learn if she be living beauty or a fleeting vision."

I opened my eyes cautiously. My small son, with tangled hair, was standing by my bed, audacity, mischief, and fear depicted on his countenance, as he bent gently forward and laid his lips against my hand. I laughed, as he meant I

should, and together we ran to the window and leaned out.

Such a world! The sunshine lay in golden shafts across the lawn. In the green depths of the Linden Walk birds made such a racket that one wondered whether they could possibly understand one another. By the sun dial Lillian was standing, fair as the morning, her wonderful hair in two golden plaits to her knees.

"You lazy creatures!" she called. "Hurry, or you'll be late."

"Late! Late for what? Have you forgotten that time stands still here and that nothing can happen?"

"But things *are* happening. Margaret has just received a telegram from some man asking if he can't spend to-night here."

"Of course she wired he couldn't come," I said.

"Not a bit of it," said Margaret, poking her head out of her studio window below me. "He is a dear pal of mine, just back from Egypt, and a rattling good sort, Lord Ashburne."

I stared down at her, bewildered.

"Not the author and former Ambassador to France? Are you mad? One of the smartest

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men in England, with country houses which would make this look like a hen-coop."

"I'm not mad," said Margaret indignantly, "and it isn't his fault that he is distinguished."

"It is going to be fun," said Lillian.

Margaret shook her mahl-stick up at me.

"Just hurry and dress. We'll breakfast under the trees, and discuss matters. It gives me a crick in the neck to talk from here."

We were soon under a giant oak, and while bees devoured our honey, quite unembarrassed by our proximity, we thrashed out the subject.

"Who is he?" asked Lillian, "I mean beside being a diplomat and author?"

"He is the strongest man morally, mentally, and physically," said Margaret, "I ever knew; and the best-looking, without possessing actual beauty."

I laughed.

"How like you! That is all you care as to 'who' a man may be. I will give particulars, as I know his sister rather well, Lady Gorset. I never happened to meet him."

"Is he old or young?" asked Lillian.

"Just between the two, I believe. His name is

Robert Kerr Ashburne, eldest son of the old Earl of Boughton, who gained world-wide distinction as an astronomer. His mother was the famous wit and beauty, Countess de Polinac, a French woman, through whom he is related to the best blood in France. They say her *Memoirs* will, one day, make interesting reading, as she knew all that was distinguished as well as naughty and nice in Europe. Ashburne was her third son. The two elder were lost under most tragic circumstances, while yachting in the Dardanelles. Before their death he had begun to make a brilliant record for himself, and it is to his credit that his succession has not pruned his ambitions."

"Has he a wife?" asked Lillian.

"No!" said Margaret. "Been too busy. He contested the Newton Division, in Conservative interests, for Middlesex, and won. Then he entered Diplomacy, and has climbed steadily to the front rank. Of course, when his old father dies Ashburne may retire and go in for home politics again. He is an authority on Eastern questions, and one day may be Viceroy."

"His sister," I said, "is a dear. She endeavors to be extremely American, and can tell a negro

dialect story like a Georgian. I stopped in the same house-party with her two years ago in Devonshire, and she ran the whole thing. She got my maid to show hers how I did my hair, and the change from a bath bun made her so adorably pretty that our host fell in love with such ardor that she had to get herself telegraphed for, and fled."

"That was the surest method of making him run after her," said Margaret. "Lady Gorset evidently is skilled in such matters."

"Does Ashburne share his sister's accomplishments in that line?" I asked.

"I fear he regards women as charming impediments to serious living," Margaret replied.

"Where did you meet him?" asked Lillian.

"In India, four years ago."

"Who introduced you?" I asked. "I heard he rather avoided women."

"A bomb introduced us, and he certainly didn't avoid me, as he nearly knocked me down. It was about two in the morning, in the jungle, and he had nothing on but pajamas."

"Margaret! How scandalous! Do be less enigmatical."

"Anarchists tried to blow up the Governor General," said Margaret laconically. "No one outside of Government House knew he was on our train. We were about ninety miles from Kharpur, when we heard a report like thunder, followed by crashing glass and splintering wood. I found myself lying on the ceiling of our carriage. Then someone pulled me through a window by my left leg, which has seemed longer than my right ever since, for it was a tight squeeze."

"Where did the hero come in?" asked Lilian.

"Right then and there. He came running along, carrying a child, which he thrust into my arms. He rushed on. The child was dead. I laid it on the bank and followed. There he was, axe in hand, directing, consoling, working with the intelligence and strength of ten."

"What did you do?"

"What the others did—obeyed him. He was tender and stern in one breath. He fought Death hand to hand, till the last living creature had been gotten out."

"But what became of you all, stranded there in the wilderness?"

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"Ah! that is the story," said Margaret. "The native engineer had fled into the jungle. There was no one to take his place, for the boiler was in momentary danger of exploding. It meant almost certain death to anyone who drove it."

"And so—" said Lillian, with parted lips.

"Bud made two men uncouple the engine and climbed to the cab. Then we realized what he meant to do. The others just——"

"They didn't let him go alone," I cried.

"Not a man moved. I see him now, begrimed, bare feet firmly planted, as he opened the throttle. The battered thing moved away into the night. No one knew where, on that lonely track, Death would overtake him."

"But he came back?"

"At dawn we heard the whistle of the relief train. Some had died before it came, and others——"

Margaret paused. Her strong lips trembled.

"Do you wonder," she said at last, "that I'm fond of Bud?"

No one spoke for a moment.

"And so," she said, "our friendship was born. We have never lost touch. He is one of the few

men for whom I have unbounded respect and affection."

She went on to explain that this Englishman was thus apt to descend upon her at unexpected times. When I pointed out the inadequacy of our arrangements, Margaret laughed me to scorn. As he had slept in the desert and eaten from tin plates with his fingers, in primeval forests, she failed to see why our new sheets from the Bon Marché and Potin's best products weren't good enough for him.

"Beside," she added, "Bud wants to see me, and I want to see him."

That seemed to settle it.

Something perverse within me revolted against this hero—this doer of doughty deeds who aroused unbounded respect in the breast of my beloved Margaret. Undoubtedly something of a prig, after all. What were we to do with this godlike individual? Some one must be practical.

"How and by whom is dinner to be served?" I demanded. "This is a château and not a tent in the desert, and we are gentlewomen and not Zulus, and things must be decent."

We looked helplessly at each other. Then a

brilliant idea struck an illuminating pathway through my brain.

"I shall be waitress!" I declared. "He has never seen me, and I certainly know how a dinner should be served. I can wear one of Henriette's print dresses, a cap and apron, and you'll see that dinner float on and off that table without a jar."

"What nonsense!" said Margaret. "I rely on you to furnish all the elegance."

But Lillian clapped her hands.

"Why not? Just for one night. If you had seen her in private theatricals, you'd never decline the offer. We'll get rid of him early tomorrow morning, and it will save the situation."

Margaret voiced other objections, from which Lillian and I fled kitchenward. Hildegarde would, of course, arrange details, and so it proved. The Treasure not only made out a menu fit for gods, but, calling Isidore, wrung from him his consent to act as butler to my maid. Her diplomacy was masterly, and I doubt if he knows to this day how it was done. But the fact remains that he promised to shave off his mustache, deck

his bean-stalk frame in the borrowed wedding suit of Manteuil's one policeman, and pour the wine. More than that, even the Treasure's, beguiling failed to elicit, but I felt proficient for the rest.

We decided to say nothing more to Margaret, who was locked in her studio. Besides, had I not promised not to bother? Bless her dear heart! Her brave Englishman should feast in luxury and be sent on his way rejoicing, with a new respect for his hostess's powers as a housekeeper. Of course, that day I had to lie *perdu*, for our guest had failed to state the hour of his arrival. It seemed safe, however, to keep to the front of the house, as the opening gate and cobbles of the court would furnish ample warning. So Alwyn and I hied ourselves to an enormous hay-cock on the lawn, against which he placed a ladder. Up this we climbed, and then slid down the other side. This novel tobogganing proved delightful. The scent of hay, the slippery surface and blissful thought that one's dignity might go off and sit down with "prunes, primes and prisms," made me feel young again.

We were whooping and sliding in full career,

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when a shadow fell across the sunshine. The sky had been one arch of fleckless blue, and we looked about in surprise. Then Alwyn screamed:

“Oh! Oh! a monoplane!”

We had just reached the bottom with a glorious swoop, and I, too, looked up. There, circling above us, ever narrowing earthward, was a monoplane, its compact body enclosing the figure of a man as a web holds a spider. Then a clear voice called:

“I say, old chap, anybody at home?”

The machine touched the lawn and ran along on its rubber-tired wheels, fortunately away from where we stood in petrified astonishment. Then power of thought and motion returned.

“Don’t you dare tell him I’m your mother!” I hissed dramatically in Alwyn’s ear. Picking up my skirts, I ran toward the shrubbery at the right of the house as though the very fiends were at my heels. But how that lawn had grown! It seemed to be a mile wide. Head down, the blood pounding in my ears, I pelted on, longing to look back as much as ever did Lot’s wife to the City of Gomorrah. At last the bushes received my disheveled person in their gracious obscurity, and,

turning, I peeped out. The new breed of bird and my son were walking toward the house, deep in conversation.

"Your nurse didn't seem to like my looks," I heard him say with a laugh.

Alwyn raised indignant eyes to the bronzed face above him.

"She isn't my nurse!" he began. Then, casting an apprehensive glance toward my hiding-place, he hurriedly added: "I'm too big for a nurse. I do everything for myself, but my ears and my collars."

"I beg your pardon! Didn't realize for a moment what a big chap you were."

He ran up the steps, and, finding the door open, called: "Margaret! Margaret!" I heard her glad cry of welcome, opening and closing doors, and then silence. There was nothing to remind one that our quiet world had been invaded by Bellerophon, save the up-to-date Pegasus on the lawn.

I then ran on through the "*basse cour*," where chickens fled squawking before me, and up to my room. I called Henriette, and our united efforts were speedily directed toward my transformation

into a maid. Being tall and slender, the girth of the print dress was correct, but alas! my smart buckled shoes refused to be hidden. However, as mere man rarely sees farther than a woman's face, if it be fair, especially that of a humble menial, I descended to the lower regions in calm security.

We made the table a picture of beauty, with roses laid on the damask between shaded candles. At last all was ready, and we sent for Isidore. He appeared, pale, but heroic devotion depicted on his sallow countenance. His mustache was gone, but alas! a great gash across one cheek was covered with a strip of black court-plaster. He looked like a brigand fresh from combat. The policeman's wedding suit, redolent of moth-balls, was carried, like a baby, in unwrinkled care across his arms. We commanded him to dress. A quarter of an hour passed as we listened to smothered snorts and groans from the store-room where he was transforming himself. At last he issued forth. Alas! The policeman must have been as fat as a Christmas turkey, for the clothes hung about Isidore's attenuated frame like a flag on a pole in windless air.

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We stood about him despairing. Then the Treasure spoke.

"He shall have a stomach!" she announced, "though it be not his own. I shall stuff him out with excelsior from the packing cases."



"A rotund form was his, over which his glistening shirt-front lay rounded like a pouter-pigeon."

She flew to the cellar and brought up an armful. I modestly withdrew during these details of toilette. Fifteen minutes later Isidore appeared, hardly to be recognized. A rotund form was his, over which his glistening shirt-front lay rounded like a pouter-pigeon. Except for his hacked visage, he was worthy to dignify a banquet hall.

Promptly at eight we prodded him toward the *salon*, where the others were waiting. His voice was heard solemnly announcing the fact that Madame was "served." We heard a smothered ejaculation from Margaret, but Lillian's voice hurriedly intervened, and they filed out to the dining-room.

I stood modestly by the door, not daring to look up till Isidore handed me soup-plates; but as Lord Ashburne, of course, ignored the servants, my self-possession returned, and all went smoothly. At last I could take a look at our guest, and saw a square, strongly-featured face, smooth shaven, with slightly gray hair brushed sleekly back from a high forehead. Breeding showed in every line. It was the face of a man who had lived, thought and felt, but who still cherished ideals. He was tall and lean-flanked, with shoulders broader than his hips. His tailor must have doted on that splendid frame; erect, flat-backed, deep-chested.

He and Margaret had endless reminiscences to discuss. The talk was so intelligent and interesting that once I kept Marie waiting in the corridor with the *entrée*. Isidore poured the wine with

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stately aplomb, and all went well, until suddenly I noticed Lillian's eyes fixed wide with horror on our butler. She glanced at Ashburne. He, too, was staring at Isidore with a puzzled smile, while Margaret's voice rippled glibly on. I turned. The salad almost fell from my hands. Our butler's stomach was under his left arm! Where once it had been, his shirt-front caved in like a lost hope.

He, all unconscious, was mincing across the room, a self-satisfied smirk on his brigandish countenance. With a stifled gasp I vanished from the room.

But how to get Isidore from the room before his "tummie" wandered round to his back? It appeared to be as fond of travel as our guest. The Treasure brought me to my senses by recalling the salad to my notice. Once more I entered upon the scene of action. With the dish before our guest, I noticed a sudden arrested movement of his sinewy hands as they dallied with the spoon. He seemed to be intent upon something in the dish, and a sickening fear of smothered beetles, or other unusual condiment, froze me.

But in a moment he replaced the spoon and

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proceeded to discuss the salad and the subject in hand with unembarrassed suavity. But, as I circled the table, I became aware of a pair of gray eyes following my hands tenaciously. They seemed to penetrate, cling, and absorb. I glanced down.

There above my wedding-ring blazed my cabochon diamond—matchless, superb! And my hands themselves, the pride of Henriette's manicuring art! Glancing up, I met those keen eyes, now reading my face like an open book, mischief in their depths. But his face was smileless as he turned to Margaret.

"Yes," he said, "you are quite right. The American woman is superficially more frank than her English cousin, but, in fact, far more difficult to understand. Her powers of audacity are more adroitly concealed. I have found out that it is unwise to trust to appearances."

He sent me a direct glance across the rose-laden table. With my head in the air I left the room, conscious of those merciless eyes boring into my spinal column through its calico covering. How I longed to throw something at that imperturbable face!

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Isidore should serve the rest of the dinner. Wild horses should not drag me again into that torture chamber. But I had reckoned without Isidore. I found him in a state of collapse, with his true (rather false) inwardness strewing the kitchen floor. His mortified wrath at the disaster had caused him to commit hari-kari!

With crimson cheeks I once more started round that table. Lord Ashburne had talked himself to silence. To save my life I could not refrain from glancing through my lashes to see if he watched me, and, each time, I found his eyes intent upon my burning visage. Would that dinner ever end? At last they rose and moved toward the door. I followed with the coffee-tray. On the threshold our guest paused.

"Margaret, will you do me the honor of presenting me to this lady?" he said.

Margaret murmured our names incoherently.

"Of course," said he, "this pretty comedy is a mystery. You see," he said, turning directly to me, "I have had the pleasure of seeing you before. It was at a ball at Buckingham Palace two years ago. You went out to supper with Mr.

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Esquith and sat opposite. It is not possible to forget your face."

He bowed with charming deference. His smile



"‘Margaret, will you do me the honor of presenting me to this lady?’"

was so merry that embarrassment vanished. He took the tray, and I tossed my cap to Buddha, as Margaret led the way to the *perron*. The night was warm and still. A nightingale sang from

the shrubbery, and frogs croaked in the pond beyond the clump of firs.

Ashburne stretched full length in a *chaise longue* beside Margaret, with his hand resting on the arm of her chair.

"You are sure you don't need a wrap?" he asked her.

She shook her head, and lighted his cigarette for him from the jeweled paraphernalia attached to her gold vanity box.

"Now please explain," he pleaded. "Were you practicing for private theatricals, and will you tell me what ailed your butler?"

"It was all in your honor," said Lillian. "We wanted to be stylish, and feared our maid might spill soup down your back."

To my surprise he looked hurt.

"Margaret! surely you were not in the plot? You, at least, know me to be a simple soul, whose main object in life is to escape the 'frills' of this tiresome world."

I suddenly felt ashamed of myself and my absurd standards.

"Pray forgive me," I said. "It was all my fault. But it was not personal to you as much as

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slavish conformity to old habits, from which I am here to learn immunity. In our new world we still cling to externals."

"And so you come to an old civilization to learn simplicity? That seems paradoxical. Tell me, what sends American women over here in such numbers, leaving the masculine element at home?"

"Thirst for cultivation," said Margaret.

"Curiosity," said Lillian.

"For rest of mind, soul and body—and clothes!" said I.

"But surely you can find all these at home," he replied.

"Our culture is skim milk," said Margaret. "The cream is over here."

"There is nothing to be curious about in America," said Lillian. "Everything has just happened, just been made, and nothing is finished and forgotten but the Declaration of Independence."

"There is a still more potent reason," said Margaret, "cheapness, which appeals to the average feminine soul. It is like a constant 'bargain counter' over here, with an ease of life, a grace,

a charm, thrown in free of charge, which is unknown in America."

"Granted," said I, "but there is still another reason. Balzac was right when he declared every woman an aristocrat at heart. At home men shout, 'All men are equal,' but you may have noticed that women are not mentioned, nor do they join in so foolish a statement. Those who are born to position, being often descended from the best blood of Europe, resent those who scramble and fight their way to the front rank of society through sheer force of money. In my mother's day New York society was composed of a group of dignified, self-contained people, many of them rich, who lived delightfully and entertained with hospitality, not ostentation. To-day many of their children are, of course, still in society, but the greater part are swamped in the deluge of those who hurtle through the social firmament like comets, spreading a tail of gold in their wake. A comet undoubtedly presents a fine spectacle, but it is rarely agreeable to modest stars in its pathway."

"But one hears," said our guest, "that class distinctions are far more considered in America than

with us. In London, nowadays, anyone who can bring to society beauty, charm, wit, or even agreeable manners, is welcomed, and no one stops to look up his antecedents, especially if he has a plethoric bank account."

I laughed.

"You are quite right. We are the biggest snobs on earth. Those who have 'grandfathers' cling to and flaunt them, just as though anyone cared! Here, for instance, is Lillian, proud of being a 'Colonial Dame' and a 'Daughter of the Revolution.' She also has a firm belief that those who are born in Boston do not need to 'be born again to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.' I am a member of that honorable company, too, but bless you! after attending one of their meetings, I fled, never to return. Such frumps! There weren't a dozen who looked as though they could leave a drawing-room properly. The virtues undoubtedly were theirs, but *chic* was not. They all seemed to be suffering from the malady called 'I am the great I am.' "

Lillian shook a slender finger at me.

"What heresy! A past of honor is conducive to honor."

"You are right," Ashburne replied. "Your standard of honor was a moral one. Your ancestors fought for an ideal; in fact, America never has fought for any other reason. We English open our Parliament with the Lord's prayer, but we invariably grab everything in sight if we can. I never think of your heroic struggle without mentally lifting my hat. These Latins, too, prate eternally of *l'honneur*, but *chic* is their only honor."

"But you, as we, judge by the class we know, and that is wrong," I said. "Round about us, hidden in this beautiful country, are thousands of homes where domestic happiness is as real as on our prairies at home. Consider, for instance, our neighbors, the worthy Mayor and his worthier wife; their mutual devotion and their fat bank account, which is never disturbed except to be enlarged."

Margaret held up her hands in horrified denial.

"For heaven's sake, don't quote them as an example of domestic happiness and devotion. The Mayor has been a very gay bird, indeed. They have one child, a hunchback son—a case of the

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sins of the father being visited on the child. They represent a unique class. For three hundred years they have been farmers here, gradually absorbing properties, storing up gains, but never changing from their former status. They remain peasants and live as such, without spending a sou to beautify their minds or surroundings."

"In America," I said, "they would send their children to college, and eventually they would be found in Newport or Burke's Peerage."

"You see, they lack curiosity," said Lillian.

"They scorn it," said Margaret. "And I'm off to bed, for sunrise must find me at work."

We said good-night. Lord Ashburne gazed down on Lillian's slender beauty with quizzical eyes.

"You'll forgive me for not having been born in Boston? It is my misfortune, not my fault."

Lillian threw him a mocking smile as she ran up the steps.

" 'Some are born to greatness, some attain it, and some have greatness thrust upon them,' " she quoted.

"I am going to Boston to attain it," he called after her.

CHAPTER III

MR. AND MRS. ROBINSON

THERE is a toyshop on the Rue de Rivoli, opposite the Tuileries Gardens, against the windows of which childish noses have been flattened for many years. I was standing there one morning, a fortnight later, with a sail-boat of gigantic proportions weighing heavily on my mind and hands, lost in the perfection of rigging, steering-gear and other mysteries, when a voice said over my shoulder:

“Don’t get it. It hasn’t enough keel to stand heavy weather.”

I turned. There stood Lord Ashburne, fresh and smart in his light gray tweeds, his eyes intent, not on me, but on the boat. Without further greeting, he took it from my hands and launched into explanations with the shopkeeper, showing a bewildering knowledge of technicalities. Another boat was produced, which Ashburne scanned with searching intelligence.

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"That will do. It could cross the Channel. But the boy must learn to navigate a steamship. I'll take that warship," pointing to a glittering monster from which cannon pointed. "And now," he said, when details of purchase were consummated, "what shall we do?"

We stood in the shadow of the arcade, jostled by hurrying throngs. Down the Rue de Rivoli motors, cabs, and "busses" flowed in two directions on either side of the "islands." A bare-headed woman, large-hipped, short-skirted, smilingly begged us to buy from her handcart, piled with fresh figs and violets.

"Do!" said I. "I've a list as long as my arm of things to do. And what are you doing in Paris?"

"Business," he replied laconically. "But both your list and my business can wait. Fate has arranged our meeting and this delightful day on purpose for us to run away from duty and enjoy ourselves. We will go on what Americans call a 'spree.' And we will go over there and make plans."

He piloted me across to the Tuileries, where the ubiquitous child and *bonne* filled the green alleys with movement and color. Statues gleamed



“‘Don’t get it. It hasn’t enough keel to stand heavy weather.’”

among gay parterres of flowers. Miniature fleets sailed the seas of dimpling ponds. To right and left stretched the most magnificent vista in the world, bounded at one end by the Etoile, loftily arrogant against the sky, and at the other, by the splendid pile of the Louvre.

“One almost forgives France for being a Re-

public," he said, "when we can saunter here. Only a little while ago the child Prince Imperial peeped through this *grille* at the passing world outside. But this is a topsy-turvy world. The Prince died among savages, and a few months ago I lunched with the ex-Empress, shorn of beauty, rank and power, living on memories."

"And we aliens come here to pity," I said.

"Yes, and to decide where to—lunch."

It was impossible not to respond to the irrepressible gayety of his voice. It was also pleasant to be thus taken for granted. Convention had no part in the brilliance of the day.

"Very well," I said. "If Mrs. Grundy strikes us from her visiting list, the consequences be on your own head. But it must be out of town, where no carpers can spoil the flavor."

"What a good sort you are!" he said with true British candor. "But I know so little of Parisian playgrounds. Won't you decide?"

"Then it shall be Sceaux Robinson. We'll go out in a 'taxi,' and lunch up in the trees like our monkey progenitors."

Ashburne raised puzzled eyebrows.

"Up in the trees? I may be a gay bird, but



"Up into these trees steps led, twisting up through huge branches to platforms."

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I'm also a hungry one. A caterpillar or two won't do for me."

"You are in my hands," I said imperiously. "Wait and see."

Half an hour later we descended at the gate of a well-ordered garden. Trim hedges guarded cool boskies from the road. To the left, among trees, was the restaurant, with its open galleries set with iron tables, and railings topped with pink geraniums. But I led him away to the right, where, on the crest of a hill, enormous trees, gnarled, umbrageous, rose from velvet turf. A fountain splashed into a long marble pool, from which a stream rippled through mossy banks. Up into these trees steps led, twisting up through huge branches to platforms. Each platform was railed and covered with a thatched, peaked roof. Tables and chairs furnished each rustic dining-room.

I pointed with pride to the view from our eyrie. Ashburne evinced his admiration by a smothered "By Jove!" Paris lay beneath us in a delicate haze, etherealized by distance. The white domes of Montmartre hung like a mirage between earth and sky. Like a silver ribbon wound the Seine

between tree-bordered banks, filled with shipping. A long belt of green marked the Champs Elysées and Bois, while Nôtre Dame raised two fingers heavenward, as though blessing the city at her feet. Above and around us twittered birds, in nowise disturbed by our invasion of their habitation.

We heard light footsteps mounting. A diminutive *garçon* appeared, his black hair, glistening with pomatum, slicked from a rear parting to his high cheek bones. His smile, illuminated by a generous display of porcelain teeth, was joyous. A profound knowledge of a wicked world glinted from his black eyes. He was fleshless as a skeleton, and his reedy neck rose untrammelled from a celluloid collar. He brandished a serviette blithely and bowed.

"Monsieur! Madame! A meal of discrimination; *n'est ce pas?*"

He produced a menu on which no such thing as prices was mentioned, and nodded like a china mandarin as we ordered.

"Is it that I shall have the pleasure of serving, or will Monsieur avail himself of the lift, and thus enjoy privacy?" he asked, indicating a basket

suspended on a rope, which ran through a pulley to the ground near the rail.

As we stared, he explained:

"May I be permitted to say that discretion and tact are requisite in business? With married couples, of course, personal attention is not amiss, but in the case of—er—er— There are occasions when intrusion is to be deplored. Am I right in supposing that I will not be required?"

"Not at all," I began indignantly, but Ashburne suavely interrupted.

"I commend your discretion. We will use the basket. But how shall I call you?"

"Here is the electric bell. I shall be below. The priest baptized me Tootin, but since my twenty-one years of service here I have been called The Wreck."

His shrugged shoulders and outspread palms bespoke a history.

"Wreck?" I asked, with questioning eyes.

"It is, Madame, that I was once stout, even to the size of this coat which Madame will notice is far from me. But running up and down trees is thinning. Also, Madame will recall that

Robinson Crusoe who lived in a tree procured many of his necessities from his wreck. As it is I who also furnish necessities, our honorable clients have thus called me since many years."

When he vanished, Ashburne looked at me with twinkling eyes, doubtless aware of the thoughts that arose in me. But he merely remarked:

"You shall now see *me* set a table and serve a meal."

"And I——"

"You are to perch on yonder railing as Mrs. Robinson would have done, and cultivate a belief in the kindly instincts of humanity."

"But there wasn't any Mrs. Robinson."

"How do you know? No doubt Defoe refrained from any mention of entanglements from feelings of delicacy. You'll have to be Mrs. Robinson, or The Wreck will imagine us to be one of those frivolous couples who prefer baskets because of flirtatious propensities."

"How vulgar-minded everybody seems to be," I murmured impersonally.

Ashburne paused in his cutting of a yard of bread, and opened astonished eyes upon me.

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“Flirtation vulgar! Do I hear aright? You, an American woman, to proclaim such apostasy? Why——”

I leaned forward and wagged a finger at him severely.

“Now don’t classify. Nothing is so enraging. It is a detestable word, and American women don’t flirt half as brazenly as English women. We just warm our hearts at the flame. Your countrywomen jump in bodily, sit down on the coals and frizzle. They become so accustomed to the fiery furnace that they walk in and out of an affair as unconcernedly as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.”

“Fire is supposed to purify,” said he.

“It leaves ugly scars,” said I.

“Honorable scars acquired in worthy service,” said he.

“Dishonorable scars acquired in unworthy play,” said I.

“Then you disapprove of flirting?” he asked.

“Not at all. It is delightful, if done on the approved American methods. But——”

“But here comes the melon. Will you kindly be seated, Mrs. Robinson. And now please explain

those approved methods. An object-lesson perhaps might simplify——”

“Method is the wrong word,” I interrupted. “It is too concrete. It should be merely a charming exchange of sympathies, tastes and admiration.”

“How impersonal and unsatisfactory! To what end?”

“That is the beauty of it. There is no end. Ends are so horridly final.”

“But how is that interchange of mutual admiration expressed?”

“In a thousand ways—delicately, without words. Not as though one were dishing up a rib-roast.”

“Then I am to understand that one should only verbally express one’s admiration for her excellent moral qualities?”

I lifted both hands in horror.

“What an appalling idea! Talk to a woman about her virtues, and she will yawn. Praise her clothes, and she will adore you.”

“Truly? I’m so glad to learn. Should like to be adored. Now, if one might be permitted, your hat is——”

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"Will you kindly pay attention to your duties, Mr. Robinson? That chicken has been there five minutes."

Ashburne looked at me reproachfully, then grimly carved the chicken, while I mixed the salad. Silence fell between us. He sighed obtrusively. I poured oil on the salad, but not on the situation.

"You see," he said finally, "you say one thing and act another. I endeavor to put your theories to practice, and get snubbed for my pains. It's discouraging."

He looked at me ruefully.

"You are hopelessly clumsy," said I.

He regarded me above the depleted chicken gravely.

"You are right. I am a blundering idiot. I have worked so much that I am clumsy at play."

"Then talk to me of what interests you, and you will be interesting."

"But they say it is folly to talk politics to a woman."

"Why?"

"Because, if she understands, she is bored. If

she doesn't understand, she listens only to please, and then she bores."

"Then you think woman is merely to amuse, but not to interest man?"

"Heaven forbid!" he cried. "I can easily imagine being so interested in a woman that other matters would become no more than a mirage on the horizon of my life."

"You have friends among women?"

"Have I not Margaret?"

He spoke with such gravity and simple pride that I was moved with a feminine longing to probe. What was the bond between them? Aside from a man's attitude toward herself, nothing so interests a woman as his attitude toward another woman. I also was moved with feline curiosity to test his modesty as a hero. Doubtless he would be eloquent enough regarding his personal exploits.

I smiled sweetly.

"Yes! your friendship is delightful! Where and when did you meet?"

He met my bland and childlike gaze with keen eyes, and hesitated.

"Oh! a long time ago; quite by—er—accident."

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"Really! When and how?"

He rose and piled dishes into the basket, and pulled up the ices, with unnecessary agreeability to *The Wreck* below. But when he was seated I spoke again:

"Well, you haven't told me."

"It wasn't at all romantic," he replied lightly. "I met her in India, in the country."

"Country-house party?"

"Not exactly a party, perhaps, and country-houses are called bungalows out there."

"Did you see much of each other?"

"Not so much then. We were both somewhat occupied, but later, in Calcutta, I saw her constantly. She is a remarkable woman. A Yogi told me that her aura is purple."

"What does that mean?" I asked, conscious that he had skillfully baffled me.

"It means healing," he replied. "Margaret's presence is a healing. Don't you feel it? Most people's auras are yellow, which means they are liars."

"That is a harsh word," I said.

"Well, call them humbugs," he answered, piling the plates into the basket.

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He placed the coffee before me, and untied the rope with exaggerated attention.

"Tell me, please," I said, smiling up into his



"'Ye gods! What have I done?'"

eyes, "is country-house life in India run on English principles? Does every Jack have his Jill? What did you and Margaret do, being of sober minds?"

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"We walked and talked and— Ye gods! What have I done?"

The basket had gone crashing earthward with a sound of broken crockery and hectic French from below. Ashburne turned a frightened glance on me. I knew he'd done it deliberately.

"I'll be scolded!" he said.

The Wreck appeared, his face wreathed in smiles.

"Be not disturbed, Monsieur. Such accidents are of frequent occurrence here. There are apt to be moments of—er—agitation." He pointedly avoided looking in my direction, just as though I had had something to do with the catastrophe.

"But the proprietor—" said Ashburne.

The Wreck made a soothing gesture.

"*Ah ciel!* But he will be overjoyed. Monsieur will pay the price of Sèvres, and cheap crockery will be bought. All is delightful—the cause of the accident and its results to the proprietor. *A la bonne heure!*"

The Wreck disappeared. Ashburne raised his glass.

"A toast, Madame, to the Anglo-American *en-*

tente cordiale, and may I never meet you in climbing the Hill of Prosperity."

"How unkind!" I replied.

"Not at all. You would be coming down, if we met. I prefer to overtake you."

"Then may I return the toast?" I replied. "May misfortune follow you all the days of your life."

"A bit hard on my country, which I serve diplomatically."

"If misfortune always follows your Excellency, it will never catch you. But, joking aside, nations are always personalities to me, and I like or dislike them accordingly."

"How feminine!" Ashburne replied. "Forever the personal equation. What is England?"

"Ah! who is the personal equation now?" I asked.

"Scored!" laughed Ashburne.

"France is our hostess, and one loves her, not for her virtues, perhaps, but for her delightful faults. She has a *chic* to make one despair, and charms the senses more than the heart. Her face is a mask, with painted lips, and her brain is brilliant rather than astute. Her saving grace is maternal love."

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"It is her best interpretation of love, isn't it?" asked Ashburne.

"Perhaps, but she doesn't know it."

"Is she too gay to hate, O Seer?"

"No, but she endeavors to be *chic* even in that. She wreathes it with immortelles on the statues of Alsace and Lorraine."

"And ill-mannered Germany doesn't even feel distressed," said Ashburne.

"Not he. He sits upright in his saddle, helmeted, spurred, lance in hand. He is stiff-necked, intelligent, and opinionated. Almost brutal as regards discipline, but I've seen him cherish a Christmas card from his mother as tenderly as you would a cricket prize. He regards women as blessed in being able to minister to his comfort, and his Emperor as the latest incarnation of Divinity."

Ashburne raised horrified hands.

"If he were here, he'd clap you into jail for *lèse majesté*."

"Never! He would be charming, and tell me more about my own country than I ever knew."

"His cousin Russia, however, has the gift of silence," said Ashburne, reaching for another

cigarette. "You can't place Russia in the feminine gender."

"No! his silence speaks for itself. He is not lovable, your Russia. He is none too clean. He moves ponderously. His shadow seems larger than that of other men. He waits; for what, he hardly knows, but he waits inexorably, weapons hidden, without pity or fear. When he ceases to wait and unsheaths his weapons—alas for Europe!"

"And meanwhile," said Ashburne, "dynamite and the Duma keep things from becoming dull. And truly, his shadow seems to reach even Sceaux Robinson. One feels the chill. Do give us something gay."

"Spain?"

"Is Spain really gay?" asked Ashburne. "She seems to me like a girl, red-lipped, who dances like a flame on the grave of dead glories."

"But she has the courage to dance," said I. "There may be no food in the larder, or money in her purse, but pride is her sustenance. She carries two weapons: her eyes, and the stiletto in her hair."

"She uses one as readily as the other," said

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Ashburne, "and neither with reason. She is a child and a serpent; a saint and a demon."

"But she knows how to love," said I.

"Still better how to hate," said Ashburne, "and her love is as dangerous as her hate. But, then, isn't love always dangerous?"

"Not in America," said I.

"What egotism! Why not?"

"It is truth, not egotism. It is because our men know how to combine love with respect. It is the highest expression of civilization."

Ashburne nodded gravely.

"Perhaps you are right. The old world is prone to find them incompatible. In the East women are respected only when old age debars love. In India——"

"In country-houses?" I asked blandly.

"Bungalows!" he corrected.

"Well, you were going to say——"

"India is in the process of reincarnation, and finds the process painful. But, being a woman, veiled, she is hard to understand."

"Yes! She practices the doctrine Christians preach, of turning the other cheek, but, while she bends, she never breaks; and one day, perhaps,

she will tire of submission, and blow England's rule to bits with a bomb. And then——"

"Alas!" said Ashburne, "it is then that China will sit up and take notice, I fear."

"Meanwhile, like Brer Fox, he ain't sayin' nuffin'. He jist lays low," said I.

"But if one listens, Madame, one can hear the sound of cruel weapons being sharpened; the sharp orders of European officers drilling recruits, whose pigtails are concealed beneath modern helmets. There is a ceaseless murmur of secret activity; the muffled upheaval of great forces—sinister, ominous."

"And when those hordes get moving, will they sail across and murder us poor Americans in our beds?"

Ashburne stretched out a long arm, covered with smart gray tweed.

"This will defend you. Have we not sworn an *entente cordiale*? But you haven't given me any pointers about the personality of America.'

"I refuse. It would be embarrassing."

Ashburne tossed away his cigarette and crossed his arms on the table's edge.

"Then I will describe America as I see her," he said, looking straight into my eyes. "Do you give me leave?"

I shrugged my shoulders, drawing on my gloves.

"Very well. Silence gives consent. If I make mistakes, correct me. She has youth's radiance mellowed by experience. She is wise and tender. Her creed is charity. Her worldly experience is only equalled by her taste in personal adornment."

"That," I broke in, "is more subtle than your attempted remark on my hat."

"Thanks! Am glad to know I'm improving. She is ambitious, and pursues shadows with unflagging energy until her nerves give out. She fancies she has exhausted life, whereas she has not yet begun to live. She is entirely aware she is charming, but too intelligent to give much thought to the matter. She has grave eyes of violet. Her hair is—is——"

"Oh! skip her hair, please."

"Very well. But it is her own. Her mouth is that of a serious woman, but one dimple preserves faith in the possibility of joy. Her——"

I reddened beneath his direct gaze, and rose, reaching for my parasol.

"Details are tiresome," I said, "and The Wreck will go to pieces if we don't come down. He'll think we intend to roost here all night, like a pair of homeless fowls."

We descended, and, with much flourishing of serviette from the beaming Wreck, we puff-puffed away to Paris. On the Pont de l'Alma, Ashburne pulled out his watch.

"Only four o'clock. We must go out to Pré Catalan for tea."

But I shook my head with decision.

"No! I'm going straight to the Gare du Nord. This spree has demoralized my powers for buying kitchen towels, and you must attend to your affairs."

To my surprise he did not demur. Evidently he had been surfeited with the American type. When I was in the train, he stood looking up to my bending face.

"Good-bye!" I said, giving him my hand.

He took it.

"Oh! I say!" he remarked impulsively, "I can't let you go out there alone. It's impossible."

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It will be entirely too late for that long drive."

I laughed.

"How absurd! Look at that sun, miles from the edge of the world. And who is to eat me?"

But he shook his head solemnly.

"Couldn't possibly. If anything should happen to you, Margaret would never forgive me. So glad I thought of it."

"Oh!" I said, "if you're uneasy on Margaret's account——"

He put on his straw hat and climbed in determinedly.

"Promise not to be cross if I tell you something."

"Of course not. But the trains back to town are few and far between."

"Very well. I'll tell you a secret, a great and profound secret. I 'phoned to my servant from Sceaux Robinson to take some togs for me to the château, as I decided to spend the night beneath that hospitable roof."

"Oh! Oh!—and you intended to go all the time?"

"No! Not all the time. The idea germinated

with the melon and became full-fledged with the coffee."

"And your business?"

"Isn't the chief business of man the pursuit of happiness?"

"What will Margaret say? She thinks you are in London."

"It would be wrong to allow her to remain under a false impression."

I fell back, vanquished. When the train was in rapid motion, my considerate friend rose, saying:

"Of course, if my going annoys you, I'll get out."

His hand was on the door, his face smiling.

"Of course not. You'd break your neck."

"There!" he cried with triumph. "I shall tell Margaret what you say. Neither of you can say I wasn't invited."

She *was* glad to see him. Promptly after dinner they both disappeared into the purple night, perched on the wooden seat of the two-wheeled cart. It was nearly midnight when I heard the wheels in the court, and the next morning they had the audacity to say they had merely driven to Senlis to buy lemons!

CHAPTER IV

DIPLOMACY IN THE FOREST

I HAVE seen her!" I announced the following day at luncheon.

"Seen whom?" asked Margaret.

"The Mayor's wife. I'm sure it was she—tall, stout, beady-black eyes, and with brow and nose of a Cæsar. Her hair is black and drawn into a tight button behind."

"Not an alluring personality," said Lord Ashburne.

"Where did you see her?" asked Lillian.

"As they say in novels, she came upon us. You see, I was fishing."

"Fishing! Where?"

"In the village pond, with Alwyn. He went there with Henriette, and I followed, to find my son ankle-deep in mud, and, under a tree, Henriette, deep in conversation with a young man, a hunchback. He had a face of such resigned sadness that I longed to comfort him, as Henriette

was plainly attempting to do. So interested were they in each other that I tucked up my skirts and joined Alwyn, shielding my nose from freckles with his hat. We were all perfectly happy, when a voice like a fog-horn made us jump.

“‘Jean! what do you mean by idling there? I sent you to the beet field an hour ago!’

“We all started like frightened rabbits. Jean flushed. The lady glared at Henriette, who smiled impertinently back, as though to say, ‘Box my ears, if you dare.’ Me she honored with merely a stare of mingled contempt and curiosity. Jean rose wearily and lifted his cap to Henriette as though she was a duchess, and followed his irate parent, who murmured something about lazy men and brazen hussies. Margaret, we’ve got to crush that woman, or we are lost. When she calls, do bring out your grand manner, and, Lillian, air your learning.”

“And what must I do?” asked Ashburne.

“You, dear boy? Why, aren’t you leaving this afternoon?” asked Margaret.

He flushed boyishly.

“Of course, if you insist, but I wouldn’t mind stopping on a bit.”



“Jean, what do you mean by idling there?”

“And we’d love to have you,” said his hostess affectionately, “but I must work. You are a disturbing element. But stay to-night, and later on come back.”

He looked frankly disappointed, evidently having counted on being urged to remain.

“You see,” said Lillian, applying salve to his wound, “we don’t wish to accustom ourselves to the protection of a man. We’d be timid afterward. You know there is a ghost.”

“Where?” said Margaret.

“In the cellar.”

"How delightful!" said I. "Just what was needed to complete the proper atmosphere."

"Not at all," said Lillian, "for I wanted to grow mushrooms in the cellar. Now Isidore flatly refuses to go near the place farther than the coal-bin, and warns us all most emphatically to avoid the place as we hope for good will on earth and peace in Heaven. He says he has himself seen it; a child, carrying its head in its arms."

"What a disgusting story! No doubt Isidore is growing mushrooms there himself for his own profit, and we——"

Margaret was interrupted by an unearthly shriek from the court, a sound of such palpitating agony and horror that we remained an instant transfixed. Another shriek, hardly human, long-drawn, hideous. It pierced the scented air which was wafted through the rose-wreathed windows, with a piercing quality which froze one's blood.

"My God!" exclaimed Ashburne, rushing toward the door. "Someone is being murdered."

We rose, upsetting chairs, and pelted out to the hall door. We heard hurrying footsteps along the corridor. A door slammed in the distance.

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We reached the steps. The court lay simmering in the noontide heat. The giant beeches stood motionless in the tranquil air, where butterflies drifted like flowers above the bed of pansies. I could hear my own heart beat in the silence.

"Where are the servants?" demanded Margaret irritably. Even her splendid nerves were out of tune.

Opposite we could see the kitchen. It was empty. It seemed like an enchanted place from which life had fled affrighted. We ran down the steps toward the outer gate. Half-way across the court we were arrested by another appalling shriek. The gate swung inward, admitting our servants and a—donkey! whose diminutive body was even then shaken like a leaf in the storm by the monstrous sound which issued from his open mouth.

The shock of our discovery, on top of our fright, upset our equilibrium, differently according to temperament. Alwyn relieved the tension by explaining that I was to buy Clemenceau, so named because of obstinate characteristics, and it straightway became a member of the family.

Tired out by this nerve-racking episode, I sought a book and cushion, and started alone for the forest in quest of repose. Passing into the cathedral-like aisle of the Linden Walk, where faint sun-rays penetrated as through tinted windows set high in a vaulted roof, I went on toward the iron gate seen from the *perron*. But it was locked, and on its farther side was a deep moat, over which, no doubt, a drawbridge once swung. Retracing my steps, I followed a high wall, crawled through an aperture, and then walked back to the other side of the iron *grille*. From there, beneath arching trees, stretched a long vista into the forest. A causeway, paved with moss-grown stones, was built up from the level, no doubt the former approach to the house. One could easily picture gay cavalcades, and lumbering chariots, filling this green aisle with sound and color.

To right and left paths divulged into dim alleys of gloom and mystery, tempting curiosity. But I kept steadily on, dipping down into a glade where the road lay between high, moss-covered banks and fern. At last the cobbles ended in a stretch of perfectly white sand. One wondered

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by what prehistoric convulsion of Nature this bit of sea flooring had found itself among loam and clay. To the right rose a hill, covered with giant pines. This I climbed, catching at roots and tumbling into rabbit burrows. At last the crest was reached. Above me towered the singing pines. Beneath lay a carpet of scented needles. Tucking my cushion into a rooted nook, I lay down.

For many years I had not been so alone. It was a pleasure, exquisite in its keen consciousness; this profundity of solitude among swaying shadows, cool depths, alluring spaces where green lights, illusive, translucent, beckoned one's imagination to wander into secret enchantments. My tired spirit folded its wings, and I sank into content.

How beautiful was this natural world, seeming so devoid of life, but teeming with energy! Alas! my ignorance debarred me from appreciating half the surrounding wonders. For centuries these forests had been, and would be, primeval; august as the fathomless depths above. Human passions, the flare of the world, could not enter here. The Angel of Peace was warder of this



“‘You!’ he ejaculated.”

haven, where beauty and mystery held sway. And “God walked in the Garden in the cool of the evening.” The ancient words whispered themselves with the sighing of the pines. Surely He was here, where the indignities of humanity could not disturb His August Presence.

My tired eyes closed with the sound of stirring leaves, and I drifted off on a sea of profound

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repose. How long I slept I know not. Something small and furry, running across my hand, startled me broad awake. The sun was dropping behind the trees, filling the forest with enchanting color. And not ten feet away, with his back to me, sat Lord Ashburne smoking a briar pipe, plainly unconscious of my proximity.

He did not stir. Neither did I. Moments passed. The smoke curled lazily up from his pipe, while I lay motionless. Of what was he so busily thinking? Presently I heard a distinct chuckle, and then a murmured "Bless her!"

My curiosity was wide awake. Whom was he blessing? Feeling like an eavesdropper, I stealthily rose, and ventured a modest "Ahem!" He looked around and sprang erect.

"You!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, it's me," I replied ungrammatically. "How long have you been here?"

"I might as well 'fess up. I saw you leave, and discreetly followed, but didn't suppose that you went in for this sort of thing."

"Only lack of opportunity," I replied, "but let us go further into this enchanted wood."

We scrambled down the slope into a narrow

path edged with giant ferns, where unbroken forest stretched on either hand, dense and coolly green. Here and there other paths diverged, which my companion said had been cut for "beaters," who roused game from their hiding-places. As we strolled along, rabbits scurried before us, and an occasional pheasant rose with whirring wings.

"If only one had knowledge," I said, "to read the meaning of it all as would a geologist, herbalist or natural historian. It is an exasperation to realize the marvels, and be unable to understand them. If Maeterlink found a book's contents of fascinating romance in a beehive, what wider interests lie about us!"

"But you surely find something here," he said.

"Yes! I find peace."

"Then I fear it is a case of ignorance being bliss, dear Madame, for peace is conspicuous only by its absence."

I raised protesting eyes to his.

"Surely, the 'struggle of ever climbing up the climbing wave' is absent here."

"It is never absent. Life in any condition is a relentless warfare. Do you suppose, because you

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hear birds sing, see leaves dance gayly, and flowers bloom, that their conditon differs from that of the struggling, cruel, devouring world we live in?"

"Of course. Nature at least is beneficent and dignified."

"Not a bit of it. Nature has to submit to the survival of the fittest as well as ourselves. There is nothing, from the struggling, fighting organism in a tear to a Napoleon, which is not destroyed by something stronger than itself. These woods, where you fancy peace dwells, are a battlefield of hunted fear, courageous effort, and eventual defeat. The delicate blade of grass pushes its way up from darkness to light. It finds sun, to be sure, but also rough winds and gray skies; but it pushes on. The caterpillar sees this dainty morsel and devours it. A bird arrests its song to enjoy this appetizing worm. The snake, uncoiling in the sun, finds itself hungry, and the gay song dies in the snake's throat. A mole, peeping from its hole in the night, finds the snake off guard, and the bird is avenged. Your gardener, resenting the mole's burrow across the lawn, quickly traps it, and its skin goes to clothe a pretty woman."

I shuddered. Ignorance was bliss.

"Why did you tell me?" I cried. "Peace has fled, and Death is here."

We had come to the edge of the forest, where stretched sunny fields of pink clover and golden buckwheat, over which larks soared and sang against the sky. The evening star hung palpitating in the west. To our left, a laden hay cart drawn by four huge, white oxen, indigenous to the province, passed slowly, their driver's odd call echoing across the fields.

"Do sit down here," said Lord Ashburne, pointing to velvet turf which edged the road.

Nothing loath, I settled against a tree-trunk, while he stretched himself at my feet, his bronzed, clever face in profile against the yellow buckwheat. Neither spoke, but we sat in silence, listening to woodland sounds behind us, and the chirping of crickets in the weeds. At last he turned. His gray eyes searched mine with grave deliberation.

"I feel a guilty wretch to have robbed your forest of its peace. An illusion is a panacea, and we are able to retain so few."

"But one should be strong enough to bear

truth," I said. "One gets the idea that it is only humanity which has the honor of struggle and attainment. It breeds egotism. But it is merciless, this instinct to live, which keeps all the links in the chain of evolution clinging, fighting for hold on life. Why struggle? Why live? The only certainties in life are pain and death. Yet everything and everyone endures misfortune of every kind, rather than lay the burden down. Why?"

"I know of but two reasons. The instinct to live is fundamental. We live because we must. Also from curiosity. Intelligence is always curious. We wish to turn the next page, hoping for something better. My past has been too full of action to allow me time to think whether I was happy or not. But, now that I consider, I realize, of course, that inwardly I am not. Externals do not count."

"You think so because you have them. Deprived of them——"

My companion smiled.

"But I have lived for months without them—in the wilderness, my only food what I killed, like primal man. One ceases to be a creature of adaptabilities under such conditions. Mental and

moral balance are regained. Do you remember those lines—

“ ‘Oh! the fret of the world with its wounds and its worry!
Oh! the thought of Life and the thought of Death,
And the Soul in its silent hurry.
But the stars break above, and the fields flower under,
And the tragical life of man goes on,
Surrounded by beauty and wonder.’ ”

He looked up at my bending face a bit shyly.

“I’m a duffer at quoting poetry,” he said, with the usual embarrassment of the Briton when expressing sentiment. “But you understand.”

“Of course I do,” I replied.

Then, by some psychological process possible only to the feminine mind, the solemnity of the words worked a reaction. Was my own pessimism sincere? Youth, health, my surroundings made themselves felt. I laughed, and then could have boxed my own ears as I saw him flush.

“Do forgive me,” I said gently. “You must think me a flippant creature, but indeed it was at myself I was laughing. What is the real and what is the seeming? Sometimes I seem to sit in the corner of my own brain and watch the procession of selves pass by.”

He looked puzzled.

"But you are an individuality."

"So was Joseph's coat an actuality, but had you asked it what color it was, the coat would have been at a loss perhaps."

"It must be a bother to be complex," he said sympathetically, "a sort of moral and mental contortionist. What is the real woman within you?"

"I haven't the remotest idea," I replied, with conviction.

"And if you knew, you would have given the same answer. You are superficially the frankest of women, but, *au fond*, the most reserved. Heaven help the man who takes you literally."

He blew a cloud of smoke heavenward, with half-shut eyes, while I wondered at the folly of taking any woman literally.

"And you," I asked, "are you frank, O diplomat? Aren't you trained in the art of concealing your thoughts?"

"Perhaps in the concealment, but I know what I think very clearly indeed, and I rarely say what I do not mean."

"But you refrain from saying all you mean."

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"Of course. But does a woman say what she means?"

"She is apt to say what she thinks, but not what she feels."

"That is why, no doubt, woman remains an enigma, for she *is* what she feels, rather than what she thinks."

"She is certainly governed by feeling," I admitted.

"And sometimes by what a man feels toward her?" he asked.

"Perhaps. When persuaded of his sincerity."

"Look here," he said, after a moment's thought. "What do you say to a bargain? If I will try to say more frankly what I think, will you say more sincerely what you feel? We might come really to know each other, and that might prove interesting."

I sifted the pine needles through my fingers, reflecting. I felt as though he was trying a key in the rusty lock of a door, long closed. What thought lay concealed behind his proposition? Experiments with human nature were a necessary part of his education. Why should I lend myself

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as a cog for the wheel by which he climbed to wisdom? I shook my head.

"It wouldn't be worth while," I said. "I cannot express what I do not know. The masculine mind could never grasp the extent of outside influences. Why! the effect of a costume, the lilt of music, the coloring of a room, the posture of one's footman on the box, the greeting of a friend, can change a woman from grave to gay; from content to irritation; from sympathy to cruelty."

"Then you contend that what men like or dislike in woman is merely the reflection of circumstance?"

"To an extent, yes! If Cleopatra had lived in a hall bedroom, and received Antony in a fifty-cent shirtwaist, would Antony have counted the world well lost for her sake?"

"You surely don't believe that love is a wraith of reflected impressions?"

"I do believe that, aside from propinquity, the allurements of environment has everything to do with so-called love between people of our station in life."

"Then you think I could never have fallen in love with you, in cap and apron?"

DIPLOMACY *in the* FOREST

"I have never considered the subject, kind sir."

"Well, suppose you allow your mind to dwell on such a possibility."

"Don't talk nonsense," said I.

"Don't be flippant regarding serious matters," said he.

"But you knew I wasn't."

"I admit it, but I didn't fall in love with you at Buckingham, did I? Mind! I don't say now that I'm——"

I laughed, and raised clasped hands beseechingly.

"Spare me! Don't be unkind and tell me you can't——"

He regarded me gravely.

"I am endeavoring to overcome the habit of concealing my thoughts; yet you——"

"Very well," I broke in. "I will set you a good example, and tell you just how I—feel."

"At last!" he said, with eager animation. "What do you feel?"

"Hunger!" I said soulfully.

"For what?"

"For buttered toast and tea," said I.

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For a moment he regarded me silently, then pointed a scornful finger.

“You are a disappointing, materialistic, illusive young woman, and——”

“And you are an artful dodger, and a credit to diplomacy,” said I.

CHAPTER V

BEAUTY IN MASKS

GRAY skies, dripping trees, sodden garden without. Within, a cosy fire in the great library, a noble room with vaulted ceiling two stories high, and walls lined with books one had always longed to own and read, the library of a student of cultivated taste. Alwyn, with Marianne and Coco, the schoolmaster's children, turning apples suspended on strings before the fire. Margaret, Lillian, and I about the table. A scene of domestic virtue and harmony.

We had played "Maud Muller" the day before. Tossing hay, while conducive toward preserving that slenderness demanded by fashion, is not conducive toward preserving delicate complexions, and we (that is, Lillian and I) had awakened the following morning with peeling noses.

As our guest had departed several days previously, we were free to utilize any external cure. Hildegarde, from her store of wisdom, suggested

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a mixture of healing herbs with which to steam our faces. We had inveigled Margaret, also, into this "beauty treatment," so she had joined us, as, under the Treasure's direction, we concealed our fair features behind white cotton masks. Two jagged holes and a slit for our mouths were the only outward signs of inward grace. In the center of the table was the steaming bowl of *tisane*, in which from time to time we dipped our facial coverings.

Margaret, to pass the time, read aloud from Plato, whose love of beauty fitted well with our pursuit of it. Aristotle, from his perch, chattered approvingly, no doubt finding the philosophy of his departed confrère to his taste. That we looked like a band of "Ku-Klux" prepared for a raid must be admitted, and we would, no doubt, have struck terror to any on-looker. But the sanctity of our domestic hearth was in no possible danger of invasion on such a day, and we reveled in a sense of complete freedom.

"It is stiffening work," said Lillian from behind her mask, which was plastered to her face like a second skin.

"And I'm as hoarse as a crow," said Margaret,

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through her slit of wet cotton. "If Plato and Socrates ever said half they are claimed to have said, they must have suffered from chronic bronchitis."

"Yet they say Xantippe was a vixen with her tongue and made poor Socrates's life a burden," said I.

"Don't see when he left her any chance to wag it," said Lillian.

"It's odd," said I, "how history always has so much to record of what Man says, yet brands Woman as the chatterbox."

"Perhaps it is a case of quality versus quantity," said Margaret. "The head of a great publishing house told me that no man will ever know how much a woman can say without expressing an idea, until he becomes a 'reader' of manuscripts. She appears to take the dictionary and utilize its contents as though words were blocks in a jigsaw picture-puzzle."

A flutter of flapping wings drowned the words.

"Go to the devil! Go to the devil!" screamed Aristotle.

We turned our masked and hideous faces. Lo! there in the doorway stood—the Mayor's Wife!

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We sat rooted to our chairs, while again Aristotle swayed toward that neat, grim apparition, screaming: "Go to the devil!"

Luckily Aristotle did not speak French. There she stood, paling with fear, evidently assured she had entered a lunatic asylum. She stared from us to the steaming votive offering to Venus upon the table. It was a moment fraught with anguish, in which we sank to a bottomless pit of humiliation.

Out of this pit Margaret was the first to rise to meet our guest and the exigencies of the situation. With superb composure she went forward, detaching her mask, while we did the same in the background.

"We beg you to pardon this confusion," said Margaret suavely, conducting our guest to a chair. "We were sunburned, and endeavored to combine cure with the cultivation of our minds."

The Mayoress smoothed out her bombazine front breadth with large, black-gloved hands. Jet blackberries on her diminutive bonnet trembled in the firelight. She was evidently unnerved.

"It has been many years since there were such amusements in this house," she replied, in a deep



"Aristotle swayed toward that neat, grim apparition, screaming: 'Go to the devil!'"

voice. "The old Countess was a serious woman, and most careful to set an example of decorum."

"But the French are so delightfully gay," I said, with my sweetest smile. "They are an example to all the world. I have been told that a *Seigneur* of this house went to the scaffold humming a gay *chanson*, and laid his head upon the block, saying that he had lost his head many times to lovely woman, but never before to *man*!"

"A most unseemly story, and undoubtedly fiction," replied our guest, unmelted. "I doubt if

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any gentleman of so respectable a house ever entered the presence of his Maker with a jest."

"But there must be many stories which are interesting and not unseemly," said Lillian. "You must feel a personal pride in a family which did so much good and gained such distinction."

"Of course, in a way; but my time is too occupied with serious matters to think of the dead. They are gone; we are here, and it behooves us not to waste time in useless mirth and vain memories."

She gazed into the fire as though we were not. Then I saw her eye wander to my boy and rest there with sudden intensity, which held me watching, too. The grim face changed. Hunger, envy, crept like shadows from the hard eyes and settled in lines about the mouth, as though something baffled struggled up from depths long unstirred. Lillian was speaking, but she did not seem to hear.

I, too, looked at Alwyn. He leaned against the corner of the carved stone *cheminée*, the fire-light throwing into relief the perfection of his slender body, sturdy limbs, straight back, and the beauty of his face, with brown eyes set wide apart beneath the pure forehead, the dimpled chin, rosy

cheeks half shaded by dark hair, cut Russian fashion—a perfect child, from crown to heel, distinction, grace and glowing health in every line and tint. I saw Jean's mother devour my son's beauty with jealous, longing eyes. The fierce agony which gleamed deep in those black eyes belied the rumor that she did not love her son. I longed to put my arms about that piteous mother. No wonder she was grim and bitter.

Alwyn felt her glance, and came and leaned against my knee, holding out to her his roasted apple.

"Won't you have it?" he asked. "It's sticky, but I'll hold it while you bite."

Her face softened.

"Thank you, child, but apples on an empty stomach are a challenge to digestion. You eat it."

"Thank you, but I've eaten seven already, and even my legs feel full. But I like those berries on your bonnet. They grow all over the walls here, but nobody but me eats them. A man told me I'd be cursed because I ate some."

"Quite right, my child," said the Mayoress. "Never, never put one into thy mouth. Our good

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Lord was crowned with them, and that is why they turn from red to black."

"Perhaps they did curse me," replied Alwyn, "for they gave me an awful pain here," indicating his waist line. "But they were green. Do they curse when they're green?"

"Very apt to, my son," I replied.

The Mayoress was digging into the interior of her velvet hand-bag, and, after much travail, brought forth a sou. She held it up.

"This is for thee," she said. "I trust that thou art sensible with thy money."

"Very," Alwyn assured her, eyeing the sou wistfully. "But Dear never lets me take money from strangers."

"But she is your friend, not a stranger," I hastened to say. "You may take it with pleasure."

He took the sou and kissed the black glove prettily.

"I'll put it in the bank in New York," he said, "where the dollars all have young ones."

"That is a good child," commended his benefactress. She lifted the rounded chin.

"Didn't I see you fishing one day?"

"Yes! with such a nice chap. His name is Jean.

He likes me and Henriette. Perhaps you know him. They say his mother isn't nice to him."

The beady eyes searched my son's face with piercing scrutiny, while my blood congealed, but Alwyn's charming face remained innocently placid.

"There are many Jeans," I said hastily, "and no mother can possibly be anything but kind to her son."

"You are quite right, Madame. Justice is often taken for severity. This Jean may be undutiful."

"Oh, no!" said Alwyn earnestly. "He is a nice one. He went to Manteuil yesterday and brought back a grown-up fishing rod for me, and a box of candies for Henriette. I'm sure you would like him."

Suspicion darkened to certainty on the large visage before me.

"Alwyn," I hurriedly interrupted, "won't you run and tell Marie to serve tea? We are all hungry. You can have yours with the children in the dining-room."

He ran from the room, the children at his heels. I drew a sigh of relief. An awkward

pause ensued, broken by a novel sound. Something rolled and rumbled on the marble pavement of the hall. The door flew open, and in rolled our tea, not on a plebeian tray, but on four gilded wheels, surmounted by a double-decked enameled table, on which sparkled the tea accoutrements.

Marie, flushed with pride, wheeled the pretty affair before Margaret and withdrew, while we suppressed our surprise and proceeded to press scones and honey upon our guest.

She was plainly at a loss to understand this repast, uncertain as to whether it was luncheon or dinner. But large amounts of nourishment disappeared between her thin lips while we chattered heroically. At last she rose, scattering crumbs broadcast. We accompanied her in a body to the door. If her reception had lacked ceremony, her departure should not fail in courtesy.

At the door she paused.

"I shall hope to see the ladies soon. If I can be of service, pray command me. But may I be permitted to suggest that your domestics remain as much as possible within your grounds, especially the small, blonde person, who is prone to gossip in the village. She has a somewhat flighty

manner, if I may be permitted to speak frankly. The young are better employed than wasting the time of others."

Margaret murmured something vague, and the Mayoress sailed away, her black draperies sweeping the cobbles with haughty dignity.

"There! what did I tell you?" said I. "You will admit that if we don't crush her, we are lost."

"She must be made to bite the dust!" said Lillian.

Margaret looked solemn.

"When we return her visit, see to it that our costumes, manners, and conversation are without blemish."

"And where did that adorable tea-wagon come from?" asked Lillian.

"Perhaps Hildegarde will know," said I.

The Treasure blushingly admitted having been the donor.

"It was I who made it," she explained, "that the honorable ladies might be served promptly anywhere in the house or park. Marie has orders to serve it exactly at five, wherever the ladies may be. The making of it was quite simple. The wheels are from the perambulator of Madame

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Philon, which I painted with gold paint. The body of it did I burn in the kitchen stove, not being of a cleanliness to preserve. The table Isidore did make, and painted it with enamel paint. Having greased the inner parts, which did cry from stiffness, all was done. I am pleased if it gives pleasure to the honorable ladies.”

We thanked our Treasure, little knowing what havoc that table was to work in the near future.

CHAPTER VI

THE ARCHANGEL

FOR several days Margaret had been otherwise than her cheerful self. Luncheon-time found her abstracted, tea-time irritable, and dinner dumb. Puckers appeared upon her gifted brow, and her speech acquired the flavor of pickles, persimmons and red pepper. That something was amiss was evident, but Lillian and I remained prudently silent, realizing that genius, like dynamite, had better be left alone.

At last one day Margaret did not go to her studio at all, but paced to and fro in the Linden Walk between mail hours, one eye on the gate leading to the court. Was it possible that she was in love, and that Cupid was mismanaging matters? When we were sitting about our tea-wagon in a distant corner of the park, Henriette appeared with a telegram. We saw Margaret's expression of abstracted worry change to one of rapture, as she waved the bit of blue paper triumphantly.

"He is found! He is found at last!"

"Who is found?" we demanded.

"My Archangel."

"Didn't know you had one," I said, with some irritation. "Where do you keep him? In cold storage, and did he get out?"

"Bud found him," she said. "He is always so satisfactory."

"Really, Margaret," I remarked, with pardonable impatience, "please be less enigmatical. We have reached the limit of our self-control, and if you don't tell us what is going on inside that cerebrum of yours, we'll scalp you to find out."

She regarded us as though waking from a Rip Van Winkle sleep.

"You poor children! You have been good, and shall know it all. It is the central figure of my ceiling. It is an Archangel, a being of eternal youth, his face like the morning, exalted, and of supreme beauty. That is to say, he is all this in my own inner consciousness. But, like a shy chicken, he refused to come out from the shell of my brain, and I have been in utter despair. So I wrote to several artists in London and Paris, and also to Bud, for a model embodying these quali-

ties. I had only one answer, from Sargent, saying that he expected to go to Heaven ere long, and would send me what I wanted from there with pleasure, if Wisconsin and I would wait. But Bud, bless his heart, telegraphs he has found exactly what I want in London, and he will arrive here to-day."

"On a chariot of fire?" I asked.

"By train," she replied imperturbably, "which amounts to the same thing."

That evening at dinner, Marie, who had vanished with our soup-plates, reappeared, not with fish, but with an excited countenance and a note, saying: "Monsieur is waiting."

Margaret read aloud the following missive:

"DEAREST OF PALS:

"This introduces to you Faustino di Monturbia, alias Archangel of Wisconsin. Be kind to him, but not too kind. His moral qualities are of an excellence to match his physical perfection. More I cannot tell you, and do not ask. Enthrone him upon Olympus and bid him go in peace. My kindest remembrances to your guests,

"And believe me, as always, your affectionate
"BUD."

"How delightfully mysterious!" said she. "It sounds like the Police Gazette."

"I am sure he is an anarchist and has bombs in his coat-tail pockets," said I.

We heard steps along the corridor, and there appeared upon the threshold, hugging the shadows, a slender individual in a black frock-coat and spectacles, for all the world like a Methodist parson, save for a violent pair of plaid trousers which flared over his high-heeled boots. He was about thirty, well-built, with finely modeled head and features of classic outline.

He presented himself politely as Faustino di Monturbia, and eyed our pretty table with hungry eyes. Margaret looked disappointed, but, with an eye on his "lines," arranged for him to get his dinner in the kitchen and to sleep at the school-master's. To all this he smilingly agreed, promising to appear at the studio promptly at eight on the following morning.

On descending the next day lazily at ten, I peeped in at the studio door to see how matters were progressing, but no model was there. Margaret turned a disgusted face on me.

"He hasn't come. If he is going to oversleep

himself like this, he can trot straight back to Paris."

I offered to run over to the school and rouse



"He presented himself politely as Faustino di Monturbia."

the delinquent. But, on reaching there, I was told he had left the house two hours before for the château, but had stopped *en route* at the grocer's.

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The plot thickened. I went on to the grocer's, who admitted having sold him sausage, a bottle of wine, and some bread. The black-coated gentleman had then gone on toward the château. I returned to Margaret, confident the delinquent model would be found there, but she was still alone, painting in clouds around charcoal outlines of the missing Archangel.

We reluctantly decided that the job had not proved to his taste, and that he had fled to Parisian boulevards, where his gay trousers would be among more appropriate surroundings.

That evening, while at dinner, Marie announced, with a bewildered air, another masculine arrival within our gates.

"Another horrid Italian," said Lillian. "He'll smell of garlic, too, and will knife us if his macaroni isn't cooked to suit him."

"Show him in," said Margaret. "It never rains but it pours."

A manly stride was heard in the main hall. This visitor had not elected to enter by way of the kitchen. We heard parleying, and Marie returned alone, to say that Monsieur begged to be excused for disturbing the ladies, and would wait.

But Margaret insisted that he come in, as doubtless he was hungry for his dinner, which he would eat with the servants. Marie then ushered in our second visitor, who hugged not the shadows, but came forward into the light.

Margaret, as though impelled, rose to her feet. I saw Lillian's eyes dilate strangely, and turned.

There stood the Archangel, rightly named. Except on a Greek bas-relief, never had I seen such perfection of beauty. He was about twenty-five. His head was of classic nobility; a low brow, from which the dark hair was swept back as though by wind in rapid flight; nose, mouth, and chin superbly modeled. Yet this perfection of beauty did not cloy. There was dignity and intelligence in the young face; a look of knowledge beyond his years, as though Life had used him ill, and worn physical perfection to human level. The manliness of him winced at our poorly-concealed admiration.

That he was a gentleman was evident, in spite of his worn clothes. It had drawn Margaret to her feet, as hostess, to greet her guest. I foresaw that, wherever this youth was to dine, it would not be with the servants. The situation was be-

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coming complicated. I glanced at Lillian. She was calmly eating fish, as though no god had descended among mortals.

Our visitor bowed inclusively to us all.

"I am come from Lord Ashburne. My name is Faustino di Monturbia."

"I beg your pardon," said Margaret, "did I understand you to say that your name is Faustino di Monturbia?"

"Yes, Madame," with a puzzled glance at our bewildered faces.

"Fraud!" I murmured rudely in English. "I thought he looked too good to be true."

"There is some extraordinary mistake," said Margaret. "A young man by your name came here last night with a letter from Lord Ashburne, but he left this morning."

A slow flush dyed the Greek face before us, while two honest eyes searched our faces.

"I am what I say I am, Madame," he said, somewhat haughtily. "I had a letter here," touching his outer pocket. "If the young man was dark, with curious trousers, then I know. He was a lodger where I slept in Paris—not a nice place, as I have not money. But, both being Italians, we



“‘My name is Faustino di Monturbia.’”

talked together, and I told him some matters, being lonely. He knew I was coming here, and that you had never seen me. It must have been he who took my letter.”

“Undoubtedly that was it,” said Margaret. “He was a fraud, got scared, and ran away.”

Monturbia was looking through a battered wallet, and looked up happily as he handed Margaret another letter. But, in the act, he drew back, took the letter from its envelope, and then gave the sheet to her.

"How fortunate," he said, "that I have another letter from my friend. Please read it, Madame."

" 'Dear Faustino,' " Margaret read aloud. " 'Just a line to wish you luck. The rest will do you good. Forget everything except that you are young and that, as Huxley said, "Science is not Christianity or anti-Christianity, only *extra* Christianity." Let the wound heal, and gather strength for the time when youth's Summer shall have passed. Good luck, dear old chap, and never cease to remember that I am your friend, Ashburne.' "

"You see," he said wistfully, though with pride, "he is my friend."

Margaret, always royal in her generosity, put out her hand to the brown one which met it more than halfway.

"He is your friend, Monsieur? Then I am, also. But come and dine. The maid will show you upstairs, where you can get rid of dust, and then join us here."

When he had disappeared, our tongues wagged. Who was he? What was his history? For a place where nothing was to happen, we certainly had our excitements.

"He is a dear boy," said Margaret, "and I won't hear one word against him."

"Where is he to sleep? In the best guest-room?" I asked.

"Why not?" said Margaret.

"Of course, as you like. But where will be our liberty? How can we dry our hair on the lawn and dine in tea-gowns? Besides, we know nothing about him beyond his name. Your friend Bud is distinctly vague. It is self-evident that he is poor, but poverty isn't always respectable."

"We have so much respectability of our own," said Lillian, "it wouldn't hurt us to lend him some. Besides, Art isn't usually respectable, is it?"

"That is quite irrelevant, my dear," said Margaret. "Your cousin is right. 'We are seven,' as saith the poet. It is a lucky number. An eighth might prevent the gods giving all that should be coming to us."

"Then he'll have to go to the schoolmaster's."

"Yes!" said Margaret, "and they can exchange languages."

During dinner our guest was silent, save for courteous replies. He told us he had found London too big and orderly.

"Nobody laughs there," he said. "They seem to regard it as a weakness, or is it that they see nothing to laugh at?"

"They are too busy being superior," said I.

"That is a pity," he replied. "We have a saying that it is only the fool who considers himself wise. Their strength is honesty, for in this age of political subtleties no one is believed, and in Italy we use words to hide our intentions, not to express them."

He then went to to speak of Italian politics, and showed a surprising intimacy with the Vatican, and more especially with Merry del Val.

"The Powers should remember," he said, "that in the Vatican there are statesmen—not politicians—each with a brain of superior acumen. Each works, not for 'graft,' but for one impersonal end—the Church. No Government, not excepting Russia, has so perfected a system of espionage. The Pope calls himself a prisoner, but no man living is so well-informed of the secrets of other Powers. Their organization is matchless, their ambition boundless, and their methods——!"

Fancying I detected a note of more than com-

mon feeling regarding the influence of the Church, I asked him if Italians, as a whole, remained faithful to the Temporal Power idea. But he answered evasively, as though having lost interest in the subject. It was early when he excused himself, honoring each of us with a deep bow, heels close together. Margaret's hand he kissed with deferential courtesy.

It was midnight when we went upstairs. The long corridor on which all the rooms opened was full of flickering shadows from the moonlit trees in the court. Lillian came to my room, and lingered, perched on the window-sill. She said but little. Alwyn stirred in his sleep, and she went to his bed, looking down at the careless grace of his sleep in an abstracted fashion.

"He doesn't seem happy," she said.

"Not happy!" I exclaimed, turning hurriedly.

"Oh! I didn't mean Alwyn. I was thinking of Mr. Monturbia. He seemed—er—he seemed as though he, the *real* he, wasn't here at all. I wonder where the real man is. It was only his ears which heard what we said to-night, not his mind. That was somewhere else, where trouble is."

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I looked at the girl, surprised. During dinner she had appeared hardly to notice him. I drew her fair head to my shoulder as we stood at the window.

“Don’t you worry your gentle heart over that young man’s troubles. Your instinct to mistrust a Latin is correct. They have not, as a rule, the excellent morality of Bridgeport, Massachusetts. Folly is their one fidelity. He is too young and too good-looking not to have been in more mischief than you ever dreamed of. While he is here he must stick to business. As long as his body fulfills Margaret’s requirements, where his mind may be doesn’t concern us.”

Lillian stroked my hand on her shoulder.

“You see, I don’t want to be narrow. You said it was one of my faults. I am beginning to realize that Rome may be as interesting as Boston, and that virtue is often a matter of taste. You have often said that intolerance is ignorance, and that *‘de tout comprendre est de tout pardonner.’*”

I took the sweet face between my hands and kissed it.

“You run away to bed, child. Leave wisdom to the Ages. A German once said: ‘Where

there is Faith, there is Love. Where there is Love, there is God. Where God is, there is no need.' "

She blew me a kiss from her finger-tips as she passed out, and that was all her answer to my moral lecture.

It was some time before my tired eyes closed. The silence was profound. Alwyn tossed and turned in his sleep, for the heat was oppressive. The usual sounds of a summer's night were absent. Even the oratorical powers of the frogs were hushed by the atmospheric pressure.

At last I dozed off, when suddenly I was broad awake, as though something called. The moon was gone, and heavy darkness hung over the outside world. I sat up in bed, listening, but the imagined cry was not repeated. Fancying it had been a dream, I snuggled down again, but started bolt upright, fear clutching my heart. Again that faint call; a muffled whisper against the keyhole of my door. It was Lillian, just breathing my name and gently turning the door-handle. In a trice I pattered across the floor and turned the key. Lillian stood there. She swiftly entered, and softly closed the door.

"It's a burglar! He is down in the dining-room."

"What!" I gasped. "It can't be! Such a thing was never heard of here."

"It is true. Come with me."

She clutched my arm, and quite fearlessly led me along the corridor to the head of the stairs. We crouched there in the inky darkness, listening. At first we could hear nothing, but suddenly a sound crept up the stair. It was unmistakable. Someone was moving softly below, whether in the hall or dining-room, one could not tell.

With finger on lip, I pulled her back to my room and closed the door.

"What shall we do?" I whispered. "We must wake Margaret."

"Can't we get at Isidore?"

"No! he sleeps on the other side of the court. Oh, for a weapon! I have nothing but hat-pins."

"Come, then," said Lillian. "We'll wake Margaret."

"The wretch is after the silver," I groaned. "But he will find half of it plated, thank goodness. Perhaps it is the Archangel."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Lillian.

Hand in hand we stole forth a second time and crept along the wall, feeling our way to Margaret's door. Luckily it was ajar. I barely stifled a scream as we collided with Margaret.

"Hush!" she whispered. "I know. I heard him. What shall we do? He'll be up here any moment for your jewels, and we're as helpless as babes."

"He'll have to hunt," said I vindictively. "They are under my sponges in my sponge bag."

"He shall take nothing at all, if I can help it," said Margaret, lighting a candle. "We must get Hildegarde. She must be General to our forces."

Margaret leading the way, we stole out of the room, and mounted the spiral stair which led to the servants' quarters in the granary. It seemed of labyrinthine vastness up there under the eaves. As we stole along, the way was filled with terrors. Once I could have sworn a figure, bent low, ran before us, to be lost in the gloom beyond.

At last we found Hildegarde's door. Even so far from the marauder, we were loth to make a sound, and gently turned the handle.

"It is I," said Margaret softly. "Let us in."

We heard her spring from her bed; the sound

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of a match followed, and the door opened, disclosing Hildegarde, her blonde head surrounded by a halo of curl-papers.

"It's robbers!" we said, in one breath, as she stood blinking.

"Really?" she replied coolly. "Will the honorable ladies explain as I dress?"

She got into a skimp flannel petticoat, leaving a yard of white night-dress visible below, and threw a red worsted shawl about her shoulders, while we explained.

"It's that dirty little Italian," she cried. "I'll fix him. We'll wake Henriette and Marie. Six of us will make him regret having been born."

With evident pleasure at the prospective fray, she flounced out of the room, and in a moment returned with our two other handmaidens, rubbing sleepy eyes. Their costumes were enough to frighten any self-respecting burglar.

"Now!" said Hildegarde, "we'll start. He won't bother with the kitchen end of the house, so we will go there, and get something with which to knock him out."

"Lead on!" said Lillian dramatically.

In single file we stealthily pursued our way back

through the shadows, where our own, grotesque and gigantic, sprang to meet them. As we passed Alwyn's room, I looked in. He was sleeping peacefully. On his coverlet lay a huge toy pistol, which I appropriated. It might at least terrify.

On we went to the kitchen, pausing once breathlessly that the maids might hear some betraying sound. And sure enough. Marie's face grew livid as mysterious steps were plainly heard beyond the closed dining-room door.

We hurried on to the kitchen, where a copper warming pan, a hatchet, a carving knife, a flatiron and rolling-pin were requisitioned. Hildegarde, in the midst of these warlike preparations, paused, with uplifted hands, staring at the kitchen table.

"My pigeon pie!" she gasped. "And the American doughnuts! Where are they? I left them there when I went to bed! The little thief has stolen them, and is eating them yonder, like a *grand Seigneur*. Oh! the scorpion! The devil of sulphur and brimstone. He is indeed a pig and the son of a pig. He shall rue the day his mother begat him. Mesdames, are you ready? We shall fall upon him. We shall belay his body



“His mouth opened, and there issued forth . . . the familiar, prolonged, agonized bray.”

with our weapons, and may the powers of evil receive his soul.”

As she hissed out the above, courage filled our souls. With martial step, though lightsomely, we moved toward the enemy. At the threshold of the room we paused, just as something within fell with a crash which reverberated through the silent house. At the same instant a blinding flash of lightning pierced the gloom. It bathed the court outside in blue flame. Then darkness fell, as thunder followed, crackling, terrific. With a

whoop of defiance, the Treasure flung wide the door. We tumbled through.

Another blinding flash. We looked about. The enemy was ours! In the corner by an overturned chair, cowering with fright, was—Clemenceau, the donkey! ! !

As we stood petrified, his mouth opened, and there issued forth, mingled with thunder, the familiar, prolonged, agonized bray.

Our weapons clattered to the floor.

The poor, wee beast had found the door opened, and wandered in for sugar, as was his wont.

As we gathered ourselves, Lillian remarked:

"That misjudged youth is at this moment, no doubt, sleeping the sleep of innocence in his humble garret in Paris, dreaming of home and mother."

Then Hildegarde startled us all by saying:

"But where is my pigeon pie?"

"That, my Treasure," said Margaret, "will remain unsolved until to-morrow. Perhaps Alwyn ate it."

"And the American doughnuts!" said Hildegarde.

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"He couldn't eat a whole pigeon pie and a batch of doughnuts," said I, with natural indignation.

"He was restless in his sleep," said Lillian.

"It is a well-established fact," said I, "that two bodies cannot occupy the same place at the same time."

"To-morrow will doubtless explain all," said Hildegarde. "As they were made for the picnic, we hope they will be discovered. Of but one thing can we be certain: they were not taken by the Italian gentleman. I regret having called him a pig and the son of a pig. Human judgment is prone to error. I bid the honorable ladies good night."

CHAPTER VII

A PICNIC AND A HOMECOMING

THE next morning seemed especially designed by Providence for our picnic. The beautiful world, with its face fresh and clean, was decked in a thousand coqueties of scent and color, and beckoned us early from our beds and dreams of crime.

Three lumbering wagons stood before our portals, minus their clothes-basket coverings. Into these were stowed enough food and drink (especially drink) to provide Peary for a dash to the Pole. However, our steed didn't appear likely to "dash" anywhere. The pie and doughnuts were, alas! still a minus quantity, the mystery unexplained. Alwyn had denied all knowledge of them, and both his appetite and bodily circumference corroborated his statement.

The Treasure, Henriette, Marie and the children (Coco and Marianne were guests) divided themselves between two wagons, while we three

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women went in the other, the Archangel driving.

He seemed a new being from the night before. Youth predominated over carking care. We had told no one of our adventure, and the secret of our prowess remained locked within our breasts.

As we clattered down the village street, a large share of its inhabitants waved us merry greetings. We met Jean *en route*, riding with his father, who smiled kindly at our cavalcade. Jean's face glowed as the fair Henriette swept by in her lofty chariot.

We were bound for Marle, a little town some five miles away, near a genuine Roman Amphitheater. We drove through rolling fields of beets and pink clover, where butterflies and bees circled and buzzed in drunken ecstasy of repletion. The sky was an arch of blue; a golden radiance filled the horizon. We were young and care-free, children out for a holiday, and we sang from light hearts as we trundled along in the sunshine, gloveless, hats pushed back; "the world forgetting, by the world forgot."

Marle proved to be pretty enough for a *mise en scène*, with its tiny square in the shadow of its gray church. Market was in full swing. Huge

A PICNIC *and* a HOMECOMING

scarlet umbrellas sheltered fruits and vegetables, between which short-skirted women in wonderful white caps bargained like noisy magpies. Under a wooden kiosk, girls were washing clothes, beating them with flails, and scouring them with scrub-



“Under a wooden kiosk, girls were washing clothes.”

bing brushes. Their gay young voices mingled with organ notes, which drifted through open windows of the old church.

We stopped to buy fruit from an old woman with big gold rings dangling on each side of her parchment-like countenance; then drove on out-

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side the town to the Arena. We found it sleeping in the sunshine, as it had done for a thousand years, green fields sloping from it down to the river, and cool woods at its back.

We spread our feast on its turf, where, no doubt, Christian martyrs had formerly been devoured by wild beasts with appetites equaling our own.

It was a merry function, though olives did tumble into the mayonnaise, and ants crawled down one's spinal column. When we could eat no more, and the children had departed with our three household goddesses, the others left me alone to investigate the interior. Memories of the Roman Coliseum were sufficient for me, so I stretched my length in the shadow, meaning to meditate with intelligent sobriety on the Past. I lay for some time peopling the space about me with ghosts of conquerors and the conquered; picturing feats of arms, agonies of martyrs, and the color and brilliance of Rome's pageantry. But it failed in realism. Rather was my interest greater in watching the tiny lizard on the stone near my head, its bright eyes, delicate body, and its pleasure in the hot sunshine from God's bright sky.

A PICNIC and a HOMECOMING

The Past was dead with its horrors and stupendous egotisms. To-day was here, as Lord Ashburne had said, "surrounded by beauty and wonder." The ruined walls encircled marvels of star-eyed flowers, clinging vines teeming with insect life. All was busy and astir. Even the motes dancing in the sunbeams were doing their part toward maintaining the balance of Creation. My neighbor, the lizard, watched me with brilliant eyes. One could see his fragile body pulsate, alert, eager with life, ready to dart and capture an unwary fly. Ah! Life was a great gift, worthy to live to one's utmost capacity.

I sprang erect. The Arena was empty, and lay, like a cup of emerald, between gray walls, with a cover of turquoise. Children's voices floated from beyond. The others were deep in dungeon cells. Acquiring a hat, I started off on a voyage of discovery toward the town.

Market was over. The town slept. Down the center of its principal street, where ran a dirty stream of water, ducks waddled, searching choice morsels with yellow bills. A cobbler, cross-legged at his bench in his dark cubby, nodded "*Bon jour.*" Framed in a narrow window was the

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delicate head of a young girl, bent above her lace pillow. By the dilapidated fountain in the center of the square, ragged boys played marbles on the splashed flagging. Pigeons circled above against the sky, now rosy with the setting sun.

The church door stood open. In the side chapels candles burned. At the High Altar vespers were being intoned by a white-haired priest, assisted by two scarlet-clad acolytes, the organ murmuring softly with their voices.

The church's noble beauty, mellowed by age, seemed sanctified by centuries of aspiration, where simple folk had brought their burdens to the pitying Christ. Peace was surely here. The warfare of the world and Nature could not penetrate these shadowy aisles, where the gentle Mother and her Baby symbolized love and comprehension of human pain. Faith seemed less a superstition here. Intelligent demand for truth seemed an impertinence which robbed without restitution.

My eyes, now accustomed to the dim light, discerned two figures which seemed familiar, kneeling at the Chapel of Our Lady. It was Henriette and—Jean! How did he get there? My smart little maid, for once shorn of coquetry,

seemed, in her humility, a new being. Beside her knelt Jean, his eyes bent not on the Virgin above, but on the virgin at his side. His gaze of enraptured worship was not born of things spiritual.

I turned away, filled with apprehension. Was trouble in store for those young creatures? Surely, with his crooked back, the lad could not hope for love like other men.

I paused by a towering column. Before me, absorbed, were Lillian and Lord Ashburne. I pinched myself to make sure I was not dreaming. How did he get here? The church appeared to be endowed with powers of a prestidigitator. Would the rest of my visiting list be scattered among the other chapels?

Feeling again decidedly *de trop*, I stole on to the next chapel, and was not at all surprised when Monturbia said, without turning, "You are wrong. It is here I have found the Latin inscription." Then he saw me. I began to feel like apologizing for my existence.

"Ah, Madame! it is you. We were looking for the monk who saw the devil——"

"Will you kindly detach your thoughts from the devil for a moment, and tell me whence come these

additions to our party? Did you know that Jean is in the other chapel with my maid? Did anyone wave a wand and get them here on a magic carpet?"

The Archangel laughed low, as became the sacred edifice.

"It was not a carpet, but two bicycles which brought them, Madame. Ashburne came to the château soon after we left, and Jean offered to show him the way, having an errand in this direction."

I had my suspicions as to the nature of the errand. Lillian and her companion, hearing our voices, joined us. Lord Ashburne appeared particularly smart and well-set up in knickerbockers, and, be it confessed, exceedingly attractive. He shook hands quietly and walked along by me as we passed out into the sunlit square. He seemed slightly embarrassed, as he ventured the explanation that his anxiety to learn whether the Archangel had proven satisfactory had brought him from London. I found his gray eyes regarding me attentively, and, oddly, his self-consciousness proved contagious. I found myself smiling a society smile, at a loss for ease of conversation.

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However, we chatted commonplaces on the way back to the Arena, where we found Margaret, lost to externals over a water-color of gray ruins against a crimson sky.

"Goodness gracious, Bud," she exclaimed; "how did you get here? Are you staying here? You are, to say the least, startling."

"Don't know exactly where I'm stopping," he replied, "till you decide. My boxes are at your château, but if you object, no doubt they and I could spend the night under a hay-rick."

"You spoiled, audacious creature. You are witness," waving her hands dramatically toward our smiling faces, "that this man thrusts himself upon me with brazen effrontery."

Then she tucked her hand affectionately into his arm:

"You know you are welcome. Come, gather up our chattels."

The Archangel was helping Lillian stow away baskets.

"You like him, don't you?" asked Ashburne. "A decent chap. Don't you find him so?"

"He is charming," said Margaret, "and Wis-

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consin should be grateful. But who is he? Why this mystery?"

Ashburne's face clouded.

"Don't play Pandora. I need not tell you that he is a gentleman, do I?"

"That fact cries aloud for itself," said I. "So much so, that Margaret asked him to dine with us before he'd been in the house ten minutes, in the face of the fact that another man of his name had preceded him by twenty-four hours."

"What do you mean?"

We recounted the episode of the impostor. From our listener's profile, I gathered that the news considerably disturbed him, but as everyone was clambering into our lofty conveyances, he let the subject drop. As I was about to mount, he said:

"I can't really pedal all the way back. I'm tired to death, not having ridden for so long. Besides, that borrowed wheel is too short for my long legs. Can't I go home with you?"

He gazed imperturbably at the wagon, already palpably packed to overflowing.

"Of course you can't," Margaret began. "Don't you see——"

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"Yes," he sighed. "It does seem a bit full. I tell you what I'll do. Hire another, and I'll drive Madame home, with my wheel behind. That is," with a bow to me, "if the gracious lady permits."

Margaret glanced quizzically from his serious face to me, and agreed, before I had a chance to raise my voice on the subject. In a trice Ashburne had disappeared. They waved farewell, and I was left standing in the road, somewhat indignant at this summary disposal of my person.

The three wagons disappeared over the brow of the hill, careening against the sunset, the children screaming fond *adieux*. Moments passed. Neither escort nor wagon appeared. I had about decided to start for home on foot, when Ashburne arrived in a ridiculous little cart, drawn by a rat of a pony, in which his huge frame loomed gigantic.

"Best I could do," he said. "But haste on such an evening would be a mistake. We will have ample time to familiarize ourselves with the landscape."

He assisted me into the absurd affair.

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“ ‘ Over the hills and far away,
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
And deep into the dying day
The happy princess followed him,’ ”

he quoted, as he climbed in beside me.

“You are a dismal failure,” I said.

“How?”

“At lying,” said I.

“Ah! about the fatigue?”

“And about the borrowed bicycle. It had your monogram on it.”

“A lie,” he replied, “is a statement intended to deceive. Do you think mine deceived anyone?”

“You are absurd!” said I.

“It is better to be happy and absurd, than truthful and compressed into a wagon with three women, a bicycle, and an Archangel.”

Silence ensued. My companion appeared absorbed in the pony's ears. The wide landscape lay in a glory of scarlet and gold. Poppies blazed among the wheat. The jog-trot of our pony on the hard road was the only sound. Suddenly my companion remarked irrelevantly:

“You forgot the shoes.”

“What shoes? What are you talking about?”

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"The buckled shoes. The skirt was not a fit as to length."

"Oh! those—" I began.

But he raised a protesting hand.

"Pray don't apologize. They looked very well."

His manner was so impersonal, and implied so detached an interest in the subject, that my rising resentment vanished, and I laughed.

"But I did know how to wait on the table, didn't I?"

"There was room for improvement. You passed the chicken on the right, and forgot to brush off the crumbs."

"But that was after you found me out. You made me nervous, watching," said I.

"You also made a mistake, in playing the game, by showing your—hand!"

"Would you have had me wear gloves?"

"Heavens, no! That would have been such a pity!"

He glanced down at my gloveless hands, lying in my lap.

"You are flirting," I said, "and that is stupid."

He made no reply to my rude remark, but

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flicked flies from the pony. Then he said gravely:

"Yes, it is stupid. I beg your pardon. But, honestly, when with you I feel like an awkward schoolboy. I lack the art of talking to women. I should like—I wish only to please you, but, not being a carpet knight, I stumble where I would run to win your favor."

"And yet I have heard that you disliked women."

"Really? What heresy! But yet, in a way it is true. How can I explain? It is that my ideal is so high; I am so filled with a vision of what a woman should be that the average woman of society either palls or disenchants. If you knew the dreams I have dreamed——!"

He paused. The feeling in his voice seemed to silence it. Then he went on, searching for words, as though trying to clarify his thoughts.

"My mother died when I was born. As a child I stayed a great deal with her sister. She was young, gentle, with tender eyes. At tea-time she always came to the schoolroom and sat before the fire, holding her youngest boy in her arms, while I hung about her knees. I was too big to be so

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held, but I used to watch her cheek against his hair, and wonder how it felt. I can't tell you how I longed for what she gave him. As I grew from my rough, mischievous boyhood, that desire grew for the belief and tenderness of a good woman—a woman who is old-fashioned enough to be tender, sweet-natured enough to be gay in spite of a sad world, and strong enough of heart to have remained honest, generous, and kind."

"But you have a future," I said, "and you may find her there."

"What am I that I should hope to win her? The world is soiling, and I have lived in the midst of the fray. It is a wonderful thing for such a woman to put her white soul into a man's hands and say, 'There! it is yours!'"

"But, on the other hand," I said, "is it not an honor and a blessing for her to have her life cherished and supported? Her faults are as real as his own. It is their mutual privilege to forgive. There is none sweeter."

"It surprises me," he said, smiling, "to hear an American woman speak of weakness and support. In your country, are not women the pivot around which your great Empire turns? In my mental

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vision, I always see the American woman enthroned, while about her feet grovel financiers, statesmen, and that humble worm called 'husband.' The wealth they accumulate—is it not for you to toss away with your pretty fingers?"

"Really, I do protest," said I with some irritation, "against the idea, so eternally voiced over here, of the long-suffering, unselfish American husband, spending his life in slavish toil to earn money for his wife. It is arrant nonsense. Our men adore their so-called 'toil.' When their millions are made, do they stop? No! They would rather die than give up the chase after the almighty dollar. It is the breath of their nostrils. Their wives are the victims, not the cause. They are relegated to lives apart from their husbands. It is a marvel that they keep out of mischief. No nation over here would dare to give its women such liberty."

Ashburne laughed. "Dear me! It requires something of a mental somersault for me to think of the American woman as a—victim!"

"It is true, nevertheless. What would they not give for real companionship? A husband to read, travel, motor and golf with, as you do with your

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wives. When some unselfish male does come over here, he is an object for commiseration. See him at the Ritz, loafing in the corridors, meandering through the Champs Elysée or through Bond Street, or in your Club windows. He is ignorant how to use his time or his brain. Literature is a closed book; the Arts a bore to avoid. He has lost the capacity to enjoy the pleasures of a cultivated life. He is a machine which has crushed idealism. He returns to Wall Street as to Paradise, and his wife is told to console herself with a bank account. Then Europeans cry, 'What a devoted husband!' Most wives would prefer less money and more husband."

"But you enjoy yourselves over here," said my companion.

"There is a wide difference," I replied, "between happiness and enjoyment."

"Yes! The Hindoos say that happiness is duty performed. Pleasure is the pursuit of happiness, which eternally evades."

As he spoke, the contrast of my surroundings and the kaleidoscope of my own existence accentuated the meaning of his words. There was no pleasure I had not tasted to repletion, and yet,

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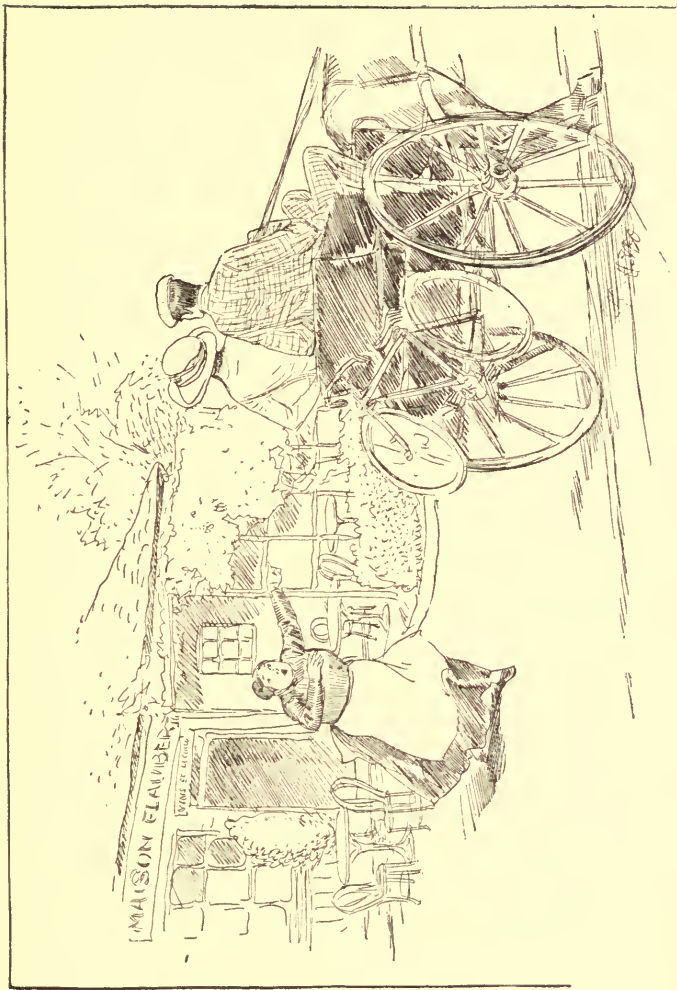
during those gay, hurried years, where had I found happiness? Only in my son, where affection, primal and absorbing, bloomed, a thing apart from pleasures.

"You see," I said, "many of us are square pegs in round holes. Circumstances have treated me kindly. I certainly lacked nothing, as a child, in love and care. I married, at seventeen, a friend I had grown up with, of whom I was sincerely fond. We were very happy. There were no mysteries, tragedies, or strong passions. He died a year later. I missed him. And yet there remains something within me which never has grown up. I am twenty-six, but in many ways I am not yet twenty-one."

"Like sliding down hay-ricks?" he asked, smiling.

"Yes, that and other things. I am still expecting happiness, which is, of course, childish. I still fancy that people tell the truth; that they are kind. Foolish delusions. But here we are. Home! Our gate is at the farther end of the street."

As we passed the wine-shop, Madame Flaubert rushed out, gesticulating wildly. We heard the telephone bell within ringing furiously.



"Madame Flaubert rushed out, gesticulating wildly."

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"Tell them at the château the police will be here from Paris by the next train," she gasped.

"Police!" I cried.

Ashburne drew our steed to a halt. "But yes, Madame! With their best detective."

"Is the woman mad?" Ashburne cried.

I shook the reins.

"Hurry! Hurry!" I shouted, with wild conjectures flocking through my brain. "Do whip that lazy beast!"

With Madame Flaubert still screaming incoherences, we galloped down the street. The gate was open. A little crowd parted to let us through. The château windows were ablaze from cellar to roof. They heard us, and came rushing out, Alwyn executing a war-dance about our vehicle, shouting:

"Burglars! Burglars!"

"Wolf! Wolf!" I answered. "You can't play that on me! The donkey again."

Margaret ran forward as we clambered to the steps.

"We have been robbed thoroughly," she managed to say amid the hubbub.

We followed her in.

"Perhaps it would be well to get rid of these people," Ashburne said quietly. "The police and detectives are on the way from Paris. Now please explain."

The door was closed on the servants and neighbors. Lillian and Monturbia were busy gathering up from the hall floor what appeared to be the contents of a "gentleman's furnishing shop."

"My clothes," said Ashburne, holding up a pair of silk pajamas. "And where are my boxes?"

"Gone," said Margaret tersely, "with one of my biggest trunks, all filled with our silver, toilette articles, spare cash, and two dozen of our Pomery Sec."

"And the pigeon pie!" cried Alwyn.

"And the doughnuts!" wailed Lillian.

"He left this letter on my desk," said Margaret, thrusting upon our notice a neat epistle, written on her best paper.

Lord Ashburne read it, standing amongst his scattered wardrobe.

"MESDAMES:

"I regret leaving so hurriedly, but the driver who brought your friend's baggage is impatient to be gone, and he takes me to the station. I also

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regret the necessity of having been obliged to trespass upon your hospitality so long. I intended having attended to certain matters during last night, but some disturbance awoke the ladies, and I was obliged to postpone it until to-day, when the house was so considerately left at my disposal. It may interest you to know that I preceded you by a moment upstairs from the kitchen, where I had been to seek your most estimable pigeon pie. The round cakes were also excellent, save for the holes within. You will find a few in the granary, where I spent thirty-six hours of enforced idleness. The jewels I could not find, but will return for them another time.

“With my most distinguished salutations,

“I remain, dear ladies,

“Your most humble servant,

“FAUSTINO DI MONTURBIA.”

Two men in plain clothes arrived later from Paris, looked grave, took voluminous notes, a generous check, and departed, leaving us no wiser than before. Two days later a small wooden case arrived by express from Rouen, marked “Collect.” We paid the charges. On opening it we found within all our small plated ware, each piece broken in two. Enclosed was a note:

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“MESDAMES :

“I return these trifles, as I find on examination they are of no use to me. I am grieved to learn that ladies of such charm and distinction should condescend to spurious metal. But the champagne is above reproach, and the undergarments of an admirable fit.

“Accept my most profound homages.

“FAUSTINO DI MONTURBIA.”

That was the last we heard of our stolen goods or the gentle burglar.

CHAPTER VIII

VISITING AND VISITED

THE following days passed in uneventful repose. Ashburne, having telegraphed for more clothing, stayed on. Margaret left him to his own devices, and we rarely saw her except at meals and during the evening. We idled beneath the trees of the Linden Walk, where hammocks had been swung, and wicker tables and *chaises longues* made of it a pastoral drawing-room. We spent many hours in the forest, where Marie faithfully found us promptly with the tea-wagon. My motor took us far about the country, where we lunched at arbored inns off such omelets, chickens, salads, and native wine as only France can produce. It was an idyllic existence, untrammelled by convention, and Paris with its throngs and turmoil seemed a thousand miles and years away.

But one day Margaret recalled us to prosaic things by reminding us that the visit of the Mayor-

ess must be returned. We endeavored to shirk our share in the ordeal, by arguing that we were mere visitors. But Margaret waxed wroth, claiming that, as Lillian and I had shared in the first fiasco, we should lend our support toward retrieving the Mayoress's first disastrous impression. She also inveigled Ashburne into accompanying us on the fateful pilgrimage.

Firmly resolved to cover ourselves with glory on this occasion, we proceeded to cover our persons with our smartest raiment, omitting no detail of veils, gloves, parasols, and visiting cards. When we issued forth, peacocks never preened themselves with greater self-satisfaction.

We had not far to go. The Mayor's residence was at our gates. At first we thought we had entered the *rea* by mistake. A great, stone-paved yard met our eyes, in the center of which was stacked stabling straw. Facing the long, narrow house was a shed, filled with farming implements. Not a flower or blade of grass softened its ugliness. Chickens picked among the cobbles, and a couple of dogs slept in the sun. For people whose income amounted to thousands, it seemed a sorry abode; but, as Ashburne said, it was just such

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economy that made the financial backbone of France.

We proceeded to the front door, and pulled the bell. It tinkled rustily somewhere within, but no one came. We waited in nervous silence, and rang again. Footsteps were heard, and a stout maid in short skirts and monumental cap opened the door gingerly and admitted us warily to the salon.

It was a long, narrow apartment. Nottingham curtains were looped in starchy folds beneath red rep lambrequins. Rosewood chairs, upholstered in terra-cotta plush, stood stiffly against the wall. From chocolate-colored walls family portraits in crayon stared stonily. A closed piano stood in one corner, surmounted by colored vases filled with dyed grasses. The floor was waxed to superlative slipperiness. On the center table were ranged a red plush album, wax flowers under glass, and a china dog with bulging eyes.

No doubt Jean found Henriette's pink cheeks and dimples a pleasing contrast.

We seated ourselves decorously about on the terra-cotta furniture, and waited in depressed silence. Moments passed. The stuffy atmosphere,

with its odor of furniture polish and wax, made it difficult to realize that a few yards away lay our park, with its dappled shadows and gay parterres of flowers.

"Can't you say something?" whispered Margaret. "If somebody doesn't make a noise, I shall scream."

As she spoke a heavy tread was heard, and in sailed our hostess, elaborately dressed. The placket of her skirt was open behind, showing a purple alpaca petticoat. She shook hands with us all with self-satisfied ceremony, and sank to the edge of a chair. No detail of our toilettes escaped that beady eye, and I returned its gaze steadily, secure in our perfection.

"You will excuse my keeping you waiting, but I was superintending jam. It is strawberry time, and what with thieving birds and boys, one has no time to waste. What do you do with yours?"

"Send them in crates to the hospitals," said Margaret. "But what Isidore did before our advent one can't imagine. Our kitchen garden would feed a regiment. He is most devoted and industrious to keep things up so well in the Countess's absence."

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The Mayoress wafted her clean pocket handkerchief to her Roman nose.

"Humph," she sniffed. "The Countess is of a most trusting disposition."

I opened my eyes wide.

"But Isidore is a monument of honesty, is he not? Fancy! I found those enormous apples, which grow on those dwarfed trees trained on wires, all numbered! I never saw such a sight. And the pears, trained to the wall, each in its net bag! He must have the executive ability of a field-marshal. Even the American corn we planted has broken glass between the hillocks, so that the path of dishonesty is made difficult."

The Mayoress nodded her black head, where well-greased bandeaux surmounted her shiny forehead.

"It is well to have faith, but not faith in gardeners. Broken glass looks well, but felt slippers don't mind it. And do numbers on apples and bags on pears help you to know where they go to?"

"It is really not our affair," said Margaret, twitching her glasses from her nose by wrinkling that member—a sign of annoyance. "We have

more than we want, and the Countess doubtless sells the rest."

The sleek head nodded.

"Yes, no doubt the rest is sold. The Countess being of a charitable disposition, it does not matter."

"Suspicious old cat!" I thought, with memories of Isidore's devotion as a butler in time of stress.

"What do you do with your surplus stuff?" asked Ashburne.

"It is I and not the gardener who does the counting. My son, Jean, has also been trained by me to keep track of everything, down to a carrot. I am sorry to say he shows little interest, but what will you? He is good for little else. He prefers carving heathen gods in ivory; a folly which his father does wrong to encourage. It is time he was married and settled. Already we have proposed for the hand of a neighbor's daughter who has an excellent dot—a worthy young woman of sober tastes, and healthy. My son will marry according to my wishes. If not, he will not have a penny."

She glanced significantly at me, as though I had designs upon the youth, but, of course, with Hen-

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riette in her mind. How much did she know? What was there to know? I scented complications, and pitied Jean. As for the healthy young woman of sober tastes, I longed to shake her.

"It is difficult to control youth and love," I said. "They are delicate and lovely, but governed by forces beyond our control. A rose will be a rose, even if planted in a pansy bed. You may call it self-will or disobedience, but the rose remains a rose."

She flushed angrily.

"I'm not talking of roses, but of common-sense. If parents allowed children to marry as they wished, the world would go to perdition. If I saw my son about to do a foolish thing, it would be my first duty to prevent it, and I most certainly would."

Her thin lips closed with a snap which boded ill for foolish happiness. The conversation lacked that suavity which should have graced so important an occasion. We had hoped for better things. Ashburne sat, elbows on knees, twirling his hat, eyes bent on the floor. Lillian's voice hastened to pour oil on turgid waters.

"You must be very fond of this place, having

been here so long. Is there a corner of France which is not lovable?"

I did not hear the reply. My ears were strained for a sound which seemed familiar: a far-away tinkle, the muffled whirr of rubber-tired wheels. Lord Ashburne heard it, too, and leaned forward with raised brows. It sounded appallingly like our tea-wagon crossing the cobbles of the yard. It rumbled nearer and nearer. My heart stood still.

Could Marie be so mad? Her orders, to be sure, had been to bring it wherever we might be, but even her stolid brain could not be guilty of such stupidity. But yes! even then it crossed our vision, passing the window. The others had their backs to the appalling sight, while Margaret's voice ran on. I longed to scream a warning, but Marie was no snail. She had entered the door. She was in the passage. As I rose, with some wild impulse to throw myself between it and the coming disaster, the door flew open.

There on the threshold stood our maid, red and triumphant, behind our gay little tea-wagon, samovar steaming, cakes and tartines in bright array. It was a spectacle to freeze one's blood.

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Our hostess stared, dumb with amazement. I thought for a moment that blue flames would crackle round her where she sat.

"Madame est servie," said Marie politely.

Her words broke the spell. Our hostess asked icily:

"Is it that the ladies wish to teach me hospitality, that they bring food and drink to my house?"

Marie, aware that something was wrong, stared at her open-mouthed, then turned and fled, leaving the tea-wagon on the threshold. I saw her flying out through the gate as though seven devils were at her heels, apron strings streaming behind her.

I looked at Ashburne. He was plainly on the verge of apoplexy. Margaret laid an arresting hand on the Mayoress's trembling arm.

"Dear Madame, I beg you to accept our most heart-felt apologies for our servant's stupidity. She had general orders to bring our tea to us wherever we might be, in the park, house, or forest, and had no more sense than to bring it here. You must believe that it was unintentional."

The wrathful lady looked at Margaret's con-



“*Madame est servie*,” said Marie politely.”

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trite face, the muscles in her neck quivering with the effort for self-control.

"I am in my own house," she said thickly, "and perforce am obliged to accept your explanation."

I ran to her. Her anger must be appeased at all costs. It was not thus that she must judge American women. Were all our boredom and efforts to retrieve the past to go for nothing?

I laid an appealing arm about her shoulder, astonished at my own temerity, for the shoulders were as hard as her visage. My arm clung there as a limpet to a rock.

"Dear Madame," I pleaded, with uplifted eyes, "you can't suppose for a moment that we should presume to bring food to a house renowned throughout the country for its *cuisine*. You would laugh our poor efforts to scorn. Our maid had never been in service before, except to a cow, and what can you expect?"

The grim visage relaxed, though scepticism lurked there.

"Now!" I cried gayly, "we won't believe you have forgiven us unless you let me make you a cup of tea."

I whisked that wagon into the room before she

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could say "Jack Robinson," while Lillian and Margaret visibly shuddered at my audacity. Before she knew it, the irate lady was sipping our tea, a doughnut suspended by its center from her little finger. She evidently thought it so fashioned for the purpose.

Ashburne sent me from his corner a naughty wink. I chattered like a paroquet on its native heath, though my hands shook as they pressed delicacies upon the mollified lady.

Was she appeased? Her face remained as inscrutable as the Sphinx. With her mouth full of bread and butter, she could hardly express unflattering opinions, even if her bosom harbored them.

We finally made a dignified exit, Ashburne trundling the ex-perambulator. Once within our gates, we paused, Ashburne wiping perspiration from his brow.

"Well, we've done it now," said Margaret. "She is the kind that never forgives."

"She will hate us till she draws her last breath," said Lillian.

Three days later Ashburne went away. We missed his charming companionship; long hours

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in the forest, where he unfolded its lore; tranquil evenings on the terrace, or strolling along the curving roads between fields where no fences broke the monotony of cultivation. In my hurried life I had never known this sleeping world. It had meant to me stars vaguely glimpsed above carriage lamps, as I hurried to and fro between social functions. Seen thus, in tranquil intimacy, undistracted, it proved a revelation of mystical enchantment.

I found that Night weaves harmonies of color and sound far more delicate and alluring than Day. Air hangs between earth and sky as though listening to the growth of all growing things. From celestial spaces falls the dew, bringing refreshment from pure heights, and weaving gossamer tracteries of translucent brilliance, which catch the glory of the stars. Mists wreath filmy beauty about dipping hillsides, sensuous and tender, intangible as dreams, where poppies hang sleepy heads among motionless wheat.

No sun ever brings to one's ravished senses such scents as humid darkness woos from bud and blossom. Perfumes rise from weeds along the roadside, and float in gossamer whiffs from tan-

gled vine and field of clover. They pursue and cling; sweep across one's path with rushing sweetness, and hang heavily above beds of fern.

Bats flit by on velvet wings. Great moths brush dew from petals, and vanish, like flowers tossed by fairy hands. Then "the music of the night—" those airy sounds of insects among grasses; the call of night-birds, the ripple of hidden streams, flowing among shadows. Small creatures stir in their sleep, God's innocent creatures guarded by the same protecting laws which control the spinning worlds in the stupendous vault above.

One loses one's egotistical belief in Man's supreme importance. Humility creeps to the door of one's heart, and enters there, on its knees. A passion of reverence for things immutable sweeps away barriers between spiritual vision and human comprehension. Within that shrine, where we cherish holy things, the Voice is heard, like a pure-toned bell before an altar, calling to worship.

Ashburne and I talked of many things. Persiflage, and the masking quality of ordinary conversation, were forgotten. The gravity and responsibility of individual life were shown to me as never before; its dignity and possibilities.

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Ambition with him was not personal, but a high duty: something beyond himself, embracing others. It was a wholesome and satisfying feast, this insight into a nature where worldly success had not destroyed simplicity, and where power was used only for service. All I had read or heard of this man had told me nothing of the inner personality, which is, after all, the reality of all men. His moral loneliness and his almost childlike appreciation of personal kindness showed a pathos of which he was quite unconscious.

He questioned me minutely as to my life, which must have seemed to him like "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." Sometimes when Alwyn and I were together he watched us with wistful curiosity, as though studying a problem but vaguely comprehended, yet which he longed to solve.

One night, after the others had gone to their rooms, we lingered, strolling to and fro in the Linden Walk, where, in the vaulted dimness, our faces were barely discernible. His cigar and the fitful gleam of fireflies were the only light in the moist gloom. We paced to and fro without speaking. I was pleasantly conscious of freedom from

restraint, as though we were old and tried friends. It was difficult to realize that this man had been a stranger but a few weeks before. I winced from the thought when he should be gone from my life again, into the turmoil of his own strenuous existence.

"You see," he said, as though continuing his silent train of thought, "we are so dual. We fancy we live through our intellectual acumen, ambition, impersonal interest, when lo! suddenly a trivial thing will, like a flash, strip us of our content. We find ourselves in an abyss of solitude, surrounded by human beings, but isolated. We are like molecules—near to one another, but always divided. Can one soul ever really reach across and touch another?"

"There you enter another realm," I said. "It is no longer the intellect, but the heart. It is feeling, not thought."

"You differentiate between feeling and emotion?" he asked.

"Men feel emotion. Women's emotion is always feeling. It goes deeper and lasts longer, and she suffers for that reason."

"You speak as one having authority," he said,

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flicking ashes from his cigar. "And yet, you have never loved."

I looked up at him with astonishment.

"Well, am I not right?" he asked.

"I loved my husband," I said, with a sudden indefinite doubt as to that fact entering my mind for the first time.

"Yes! no doubt, as you love your boy. But, dear Madame, there are as many different ways of loving as there are tints to a rose. The average person fails even faintly to comprehend the meaning of the word."

"Of course," I said, "we have our dreams of an immortal passion, but does it exist out of dreams?"

"No human brain can conceive of a non-existent thing. If its capacity does not exist, the dream is not dreamed."

We had seated ourselves on the moss-covered stone bench under the trees. He leaned forward, his knotted hands hanging between his knees. He sat silent for a moment, then asked with boyish hesitation, "May I tell you my conception of what my dream might be?"

I nodded, leaning back against the tree-trunk.

Except for ourselves, the night seemed to enfold an empty world.

“Love! Love!” he said slowly. “After all, how can I find words for so intangible and beautiful a thing? It should begin with intellectual sympathy, which grows to friendship, sincere and sane. Affection follows. Then tenderness, flavored with fear. Then, and, mark you, last, passion glows, and radiates the whole. But it takes the four to make perfection. And then it must reach to the depths, and ascend to purest heights. It must embrace compassion and tolerance. It must raise up and strengthen, as well as cherish and protect. It must worship, yet for weakness give sympathy and comprehension. It must be a glory and a servitude. It must fill the human heart till Life’s sordidness is forgotten; yet be so vast and of such mighty strength that one’s heart cannot hold it all, and it spreads beyond, to the world outside, where pain is. Of its own joy must it give to those who have none, and be so deeply rooted that, if never told and never returned, it still can bless.”

There was a moment’s silence. “Is that not religion?” I asked.

“It is a religion, or should be. Not an episode,

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as in most lives. And you—do you find my dream impossible?”

I did not answer. I was glad of the darkness, for from some depth within tears had risen and lay on my lashes. A sense of having been cheated of Life's meaning held me silent. He had said there was no dream without the capacity. Doubtless, hidden in his life of which I knew so little, such a dream had been reality.

Suddenly I felt like a child shut out in darkness, from where I could see light, warmth, and shelter, but not for me. Not a few men had said they loved me, but what pinchbeck had their love been: a thing of air where passion had masqueraded as Love, and wounded vanity brought speedy forgetfulness. A strange sense of isolation seized me, acute and keenly painful. This self-contained man beside me, had he known its glory? I studied the motionless profile which seemed to hide many things I longed to know. Suddenly he leaned forward, peering at me in the gloom.

“Why this silence?” he asked lightly. “Have I bored you with my rhapsodies? You have not answered my question. Do you find my dream impossible?”

With an effort I answered in a voice as light as his own.

"What you said reminds me of Turner's pictures. They are of actualities, but so transfigured by poetic conception as hardly to be recognized."

"I am at least glad that you admit their actuality," he said, smiling. "You see, I am educating you."

I rose. Holding out my skirts, I courtesied low before him.

"I most humbly thank you, O master," said I, laughing. "But it is safer to learn by experience of others than from one's own."

"And if——" he began, leaning forward. But I moved away, shaking a warning finger. "It is scandalously late, and time we were off to the land where other dreams await us."

He rose reluctantly, and we went toward the house. In the hall we met Margaret, candle in hand, trouble written on her sleepy countenance.

"What do you suppose is going to happen now? Here is a notification from the Mayor, saying that the maneuvers of the army are to take place near here and asking how many officers we can furnish with bed and board. Twelve hundred men are to

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be quartered in our village, if you please! What they are to sleep on, and what they are to eat and drink, is beyond me. I don't know of a hen-roost which is untenanted. As for officers——!"

Speech failed her.

"And I came for a 'rest cure'," said I, laughing.

"But what shall we do?" she asked despairingly.

"Ask the Treasure," suggested Ashburne.

"Of course! Bud, you are a clever creature. She knows about officers, her father being one. But even she can't perform the miracle of the loaves and fishes, to say nothing of sheets and pillow-cases."

"The 'Bon Marché' and 'Potin' can," said I.

"Think of Isidore and his splendiferous garden. It will look like Pharoah's garden after the locusts had dined. We will have to live on American canned vegetables the rest of our sojourn," I said, with a grimace.

"Oh, no," said Ashburne. "It isn't so informal as all that. Beside, they pay for what they take. By the way, I was going to-morrow, but it is my plain duty to remain. You can't possibly receive them in a manless house."

This unselfish suggestion Margaret received with a quizzical smile and profound assurance of her appreciation.

The following Sunday scouts arrived to ascertain how many officers we could accommodate. Sixteen, we said, was our limit. A few hours later they began to arrive, heralded by clouds of dust, and the dull tramp of thousands of feet: a sound never heard before by me, save to martial music and acclaiming crowds. It had an ominous sound; this sullen vibration along our peaceful roads, where larks sprang into the blue, songless, and affrighted. It articulated war, ruthless and terrible.

They poured into our village, swarmed into fields, camped in gardens and amid graves in the little cemetery. Their one cry was for water, and it became a serious question, as our supply was limited.

Twilight saw flames, from brasiers filled with charcoal, springing in all directions, each with its shadowy group of squatting figures, watching Isidore's cherished potatoes roast, while corks popped, and songs and jests mingled with clatter of arms.

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The commanding officer proved to be a delightful, white-haired martinet. With him were the Foreign Representatives: an Englishman, big and silent; a German, whose heels continually clicked together as he bowed his little bows to the ladies; also an Italian, with fierce mustache, and the air of a startled fawn. Several times I found the latter eyeing the Archangel with puzzled scrutiny, but he had no opportunity for conversation, as Monturbia kept out of the way. Our limit of sixteen stretched to twenty-two. Some slept on the salon floor, wrapped in their own blankets.

The dinner that night was charming. We made proper toilettes for the occasion, and, although both plates and cutlery were lacking, laughter and chatter were plentiful. After dinner the Italian sang superbly to my accompaniment, while the General paid boyish court to Lillian, who rose to the occasion like a fish in familiar waters. Once, happening to glance at Monturbia, I surprised him watching Lillian with an intensity which startled me unpleasantly. But as he caught my eye, the impression vanished, and, fancying it a trick of swaying candle-light, I put it from my mind. However, it left a disagreeable sense of something

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which evaded, but I reassured myself with the thought of her suave indifference toward him, her disapproval of all he represented, and laughed at my momentary fear. To be sure, the intimacy of our life had thrown them much together, but frankly and wholesomely. Doubtless he admired her; who could help it? But surely he would not dare to regard meeting her other than as a charming incident.

CHAPTER IX

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THE next morning I was aroused from slumber by a rat-a-tat-tat on my door, and a stentorian voice bellowing: "*C'est trois heures, mon Capitaine!*"

I sat up in bed half awake.

"What?" I demanded.

The door flew open. Alas! I had forgotten to lock it, and a large red head protruded through the aperture. His rubicund face paled with fright when he saw my tousled head where his "*Capitaine's*" should have been. The door slammed, and I heard him go down to Margaret's room, and again: "*C'est trois heures, mon Capitaine!*"

Then Margaret's wrathful voice: "I'm not your *Capitaine*. He is down on the billiard table."

It was dawn. Hurriedly dressing, I ran downstairs. The court swarmed with men and horses. Bugles sounded. Hoarse cries, jingling spurs sounded, swords glittered and clanked. All was



"The door flew open . . . and a large red head protruded through the aperture."

confusion and bustle. Orderlies hurried to and fro; while beneath the beech trees the General studied maps spread on the kitchen table, surrounded by officers.

Breakfast was eaten standing, in a babel of sound and movement. Out in the village, battalions formed and marched away to the beat of drums. Men and women swarmed in doorways and windows. I caught a glimpse of Henriette's

and Jean's laughing faces framed in the ivy of the granary window, and, as though impelled, my eyes were drawn from them to the church steps opposite, where stood the Mayor's wife, watching them with narrowed eyes from behind her husband's brawny back. Madame Philon, preening her handsome person in her doorway, dispensed smiles broadcast as the masculine host marched by.

When the last straggler had disappeared, we returned to the house, which resembled a recently vacated lunatic asylum. Isidore, with a face of tragic fury, declared it was high time the Kings of France should bestir themselves, and put down this ungodly republic, where an honest man could not even call a cabbage his own.

By ten o'clock partial order was restored, and we started to follow the soldiers to the scene of action. Our guide was the cloud of dust which hung above the marching host. I was greatly disappointed to learn that we could only skirt the battlefield; for I had fondly imagined we were to be quite cozily elbow-to-elbow with the General and his Staff; perhaps to have suggested picturesque places for the scene of mimic slaughter.

But no; we were summarily ordered to remain

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safely out of the way on a hill under some trees, and to this day I know no more of war's horrid mysteries than I did before.

From our vantage ground we saw cavalry tear across peaceful fields; men swarm up one hill and down another. We heard cannon roar, and rifles crackling like fire-works on a Fourth of July. Smoke rolled in billows from the edge of a wood, and far away on a hillside a group of men stood, watching through field-glasses. It all seemed meaningless and exceedingly hard work for a hot summer's day; and one pitied those human machines as, hour after hour, they marched and "double-stepped," while the sun climbed a brazen sky. All that they might become skillful in the art of killing.

The Archangel seemed strangely silent. An expression of bitterness marred his look of eternal youth. He threw himself at my feet after luncheon.

"How I hate it all!" he exclaimed savagely. "Can humanity find no saner way to settle its differences than that?" pointing a scornful finger to where troops ran to and fro like frenzied ants. "All that waste of brain and nerve-tissue, beside

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countless amounts of money, utilized to such ignoble ends. Think of the good accomplished were it given other outlets, while a few master-minds met together to settle differences. How undignified it all is. Look at them, like children practicing for a game in pretty uniforms. But what horror this game means! The anguish, the pain and terror, the poverty and suffering at home, where widows and orphans live to bear the burden meant to be shared by their shoulders. The wrong cries to Heaven. Will the time never come when men will lay down their arms and say to those who govern them: 'We refuse to murder. We refuse to throw away our lives for your selfish ends. We are brothers, of one Father, who commanded us to love one another'?"

"You speak like a socialist," I said.

"What do you call a socialist?" he asked gravely.

"Somebody who wishes to upset the existing order of society."

"Then I am not one. I do not wish to upset any kind of 'order.' I would wish to end disorder."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, to end this farce of so-called civiliza-

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tion, which preaches the beatitudes to the heathen in dark corners of the world, and calls for eighty million pounds' worth of war-ships at home. To put an end to the support of idle aunts, uncles, and cousins of royalty, while the poor crowd the gutters, searching for bread. To end this withdrawal of the rich from contact with the misery of the poor. Christ preached His Gospel while homeless. His 'servants' live in palaces, draw fat salaries, and cultivate agreeable conversation for dinner-parties. The Pope—where was he when Messina went down in fire and blood? Did he hasten from his palace to comfort and succor his people, as his Master would have done? Did he go about among those homeless, bereft wretches, personally aiding and assuaging their sufferings? No! he sent a telegram of condolence to the Mayor, who was safely in Heaven with his entire family, and a check."

As he spoke, Ashburne and Lillian joined us. I saw Monturbia glance apprehensively at the former, as though conscious of some folly. The tragic earnestness left his face.

"I'm airing my hobby," he said lightly; and then, springing to his feet, suggested our going

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down to the river, whose bending willows Margaret was sketching. He and Lillian strolled ahead. Ashburne followed them with serious eyes.

"Do you think that quite wise?" he asked.

"You mean Lillian and that beautiful youth?" I said, surprised by the gravity of his voice. "Perhaps you don't know that she regards a Latin in the same light as champagne—fizzy but not filling; principally gas. It is her Bridgeport training. She could never regard him as a real man, you know."

"Are you sure? What if she did?"

"What a dreadful idea! You make me quite nervous."

"It would be a pity," he replied. "A pity for all concerned."

He hesitated, as though about to add something, but relapsed into silence. We turned down a narrow path and followed the stream, whose rippling voice was an accompaniment to our own.

Sunlight dappled and flickered on eddies and shadowed pools. Under a bank we found Alwyn alone, bent double, bare-footed. He was running here and there, peering intently at the moist

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ground. He raised a warning hand, and in a whisper bade us halt.

"I'm on their track," he hissed. "I'm Red Feather of Bloody Gulch, and the White Man shall not escape my vengeance. I will track him to his doom, and his scalp shall dry at the door of my wigwam."

He was lost to realities, scanning tiny bird-tracks in the damp earth. He ran them to cover at last in a beaver's hole with a triumphant war-whoop, and, after executing a war-dance of horrifying realism, consented to become a little boy once more, and joined us beneath a willow.

"You like to play Indian, too, don't you?" he asked Ashburne, with a confidential nod.

"No doubt I did once upon a time, but it is many years since I followed your blood-thirsty profession."

My son opened brown eyes wide.

"Oh, I say! You mustn't hedge, you know. I saw you tracking only yesterday, exactly as I do. You were looking, looking, and when you found a clear track, you bent down and stroked it, so the other Indians couldn't find it."

Ashburne stared, bewildered; then I saw the

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blood slowly dye his face deep crimson, while, with an embarrassed laugh, he endeavored to change the conversation. But Alwyn was full of the subject.

"Yes, I was up a tree, just over your head, and I saw. It was only Dear's foot-prints. One can always tell them, she has such dreadfully little feet, hasn't she? And wears such silly little shoes with heels like stilts. But you should never stroke a track. It spoils the scent."

I looked straight ahead, strangling a wild desire to laugh. There was a painful silence, during which no doubt the big Indian longed to throttle the little Indian.

"You shouldn't call your mother's shoes silly, my boy. It isn't polite."

"But they are silly, and a man must be truthful, you know. And I am polite to Dear. I button her up behind when Henriette isn't there, and she says no one can brush her hair as well as I can. You see, I'm learning to be polite, because Dear wants me to be an Ambassador when I grow up. They keep the peace of nations, she says, that way, instead of fighting. But I'd rather be a soldier. When I get angry I forget about politeness, and

just want to lick the other fellow. It seems easier somehow."

We all laughed.

"Yes, old chap," said Ashburne, "it does seem easier, but then the other fellow licks you sometimes, and then what?"

"Oh! I don't mind, if he is bigger than I am. I hit as hard as I can above the belt and do my best. If one gets hurt, one doesn't cry, you know. That isn't sporting."

"Quite right, my boy. Crying never helps matters. We all get beaten one way or another, but there are other ways of being strong than with the fists. Gentleness is sometimes the greater strength, and kindness a better weapon."

Alwyn nodded.

"That is what the Mayor is. You know how tremendously strong he is, yet he is awfully kind. I heard the post-mistress say he is kind even to Madame Philon. He gives her petticoats all trimmed with lace like Dear's. She wears them when she goes to Paris with him. Jean is kind, too. He is just too nice to Henriette for words. She was crying the other day in the '*basse cour*,' and he kissed her just as though she was his own

little sister. It seemed to make her feel a lot better."

"You seem to know a great deal," said I, "about other people's affairs. You should be looking after your own, my son."

"But I do, dearest Dear. And it is my affair, for aren't they all my friends? They don't mind me, being only a little boy. Isidore says I'm like asparagus: the more you cut it down and cover it up, the more it keeps on. It's better to let me alone."

"On the theory: 'Chain up a child, and away he will go'," said Ashburne.

"It keeps a fellow pretty busy," said Alwyn gravely. "There seems a lot to do. Jean gives me lessons in carving. He makes the most beautiful crucifixes in ivory, and funny little images he says are Japanese gods. He sells them in Paris to a man who sells them as real Japanese. But it is the man, and not Jean, who does the lying. Then I have to help Cousin Lillian and Mr. Monturbia with French. They are like me; they don't use books much, for their grammar hasn't half its leaves cut. They think talking the best way. But they don't talk about sensible things much, like

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Indians and wild beasts. It is always about what he thinks and she thinks, and what they both feel about all kinds of foolish things. Girls are so queer!"

Ashburne glanced at me significantly.

"Why, Alwyn," I said. "They see so little of each other."

"But they are a lot together," replied my observant son. "It does seem as though they couldn't miss each other, no matter where they start from. He starts one way and she another, but they always seem to come back the same way."

"Quite like a game of fox and goose," said I.

"Yes! just like that. But if they meet they always ask me to stay. Perhaps they are shy. I know how it is. At dancing-school it always was easier if another chap hung around to talk a bit."

"Was it?" said Ashburne. "I don't always find it so."

"But you are a grown-up. Besides, men don't bother with girls. That is, real men like you. I say, don't you think Cousin Lillian has the loveliest hair! It is like the shiny stuff they put on Christmas trees. I asked Mr. Monturbia if he didn't think so, and he said it was far prettier."

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“Really?” I said. “And what else did Mr. Monturbia say?”

“Oh! he talked like poetry; something about moon-beams caught in a fairy’s web, and stuff like that.”

“All about her?” asked Ashburne.

“Mostly. He always finds a lot to say about her, and as for listening!—he is just great on listening. I tell him about her aunt at home, Bridgeport, and the sleigh-rides. He didn’t exactly like the idea of her having been in the sleighs built just for two. Said it was dangerous. When I explained how hard they were to upset, he laughed, and said he hadn’t meant the sleigh, but other things.”

“No doubt,” said I. “In Italy, sleighs built for two would shock society as much as Messina’s earthquake.”

“He says he is going there,” continued Alwyn.

“To Messina?” I asked

“No! to Bridgeport. I promised to show him how to play base-ball.”

As he spoke, a cannon roared alarmingly near. The earth reverberated as though shaken by Ti-

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tanic hands. Margaret called to us. Lillian and Monturbia came running down the slope. We fled up through the trees to our hillock, and only just in time, for close at our heels swarmed hundreds of soldiers, hatless, begrimed, wading ankle deep in the stream, evidently routed and hotly pursued by the enemy. Wild cries, hoarse commands, and thud of galloping hoofs drowned the song of birds and the ripple of water. The human whirlwind passed on and away to the open country beyond, while artillery thundered from the hill behind us.

The sun was setting in gory splendor, and we decided it was time to move homewards, to prepare for hungry warriors. Returning through the battle-field, we were thankful that no dead lay among the wheat-stacks.

It was long after dark when the men came pouring into the village, foot-sore and weary. Many were fainting from exhaustion, and piteously begged for water. Our kind though naughty Mayor ordered all his farm-hands to pass buckets with Isidore and his sons, from our respective wells, among the prostrate figures, fallen where they could, on the cobbles of the street, and against

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the road-side hedges. Too exhausted to eat, many slept where they fell, heads pillowed on their arms.

Firelight from charcoal brasiers danced fantastically on cottage walls and huddled figures, above which smoke wreathed and twisted in the windless air. Our little hamlet seemed transformed into a thing of pain and evil, as though a Spirit of Cruelty stalked there, brutalizing and callous. As Monturbia had said: "All this to teach men the art of killing their fellow-men!"

Later, however, all was life and gayety at our hospitable board. The officers, gratified by a successful day, made every effort to charm. General B——, at the close of the dinner, rose, glass in hand, and with delightful grace proposed a toast in our honor, to which the others responded with ringing cheers. Then a charming thing occurred.

Our big American flag was brought from its staff on the lawn. The officers held the edges, and in a moment it was suspended like a tent above the table, the men standing on their chairs. Then they all sang the "Marséillaise," holding our flag above us. Their voices rang strong and spirited

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through the old house, and out through the open windows to the tired men lying beneath the stars. It was all very jolly and foreign, and when the white-haired General proposed three cheers, one felt they were no longer "ships that pass in the night," but comrades.

As we passed out to the terrace for coffee, I saw Monturbia talking earnestly to the Italian officer. He had his hand on the other's shoulder, and seemed to dominate the older man. My curiosity roused, I went toward them, but they moved away down the lawn, and I saw no more of them.

I went to bed distinctly disturbed. Alwyn's innocent disclosures had opened my eyes to several things. First of all, had I, in my selfish absorption, allowed an awkward situation to arise regarding Lillian? I tried to remember any signs of her interest in Monturbia, but in vain. Her tranquillity had apparently remained undisturbed. Perhaps he had succumbed temporarily to her grace and charm. If so, probably no harm would accrue other than a heart-ache for a few weeks. But, even as I thus consoled myself, an uncomfortable doubt as to that young man's powers of taking things lightly gave my conscience a sharp

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twinge. He had not appeared to be of a superficial make-up. I should have remembered that we were not in Arcady, and that youth, beauty, and propinquity were a dangerous combination.

I could not sleep, and tossed and turned in wretched uneasiness. But through it all, like a pure stream from a hidden spring in unknown depths, welled one thought of exquisite joy. I smiled; yes, even laughed softly aloud in the darkness, as Alwyn's ingenuous tale repeated itself in my wakeful brain. "He," too, had played Indian, and stroked the foot-print! Was there ever anything so delightfully foolish? How supremely idiotic, and yet, how dear! The remembrance of that bronzed face covered by that mounting crimson, and its look of boyish embarrassment, filled me with tremulous joy.

The room was stifling. Springing from my bed, I went to the window. The park lay asleep in the starlight. Not a soul was to be seen. But yes! there, beneath the giant beech before Lillian's window, a figure was discernible, motionless. Even as I looked, it came out from the shadow, and paced to and fro on the edge of the lawn. It was the Archangel, bare-headed, hands clasped be-

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hind him, shoulders bent as though beneath a burden.

In a trice my hair was knotted up. Hastily dressing, I slipped into a tea-gown, and was halfway downstairs before I awoke to my own folly. The house was full of men. The court on the other side was like a camp. Beside, what had I to say to Monturbia, or he to me? My imagination had perhaps woven a tissue of complications which had no foundation in fact. But, feeling committed, I went on and, silently as a shadow, let myself out at the side door. Not a creature stirred. There was only the sound of Monturbia's foot-steps, muffled on the turf. I waited for him and softly spoke his name.

He came forward, not at all surprised apparently to see me there. His face was white and drawn. Laying my fingers on his arm, I drew him into the gloom of the Linden Walk to the stone bench of other memories. He stood before me with bent head, as I sat looking up at him.

"Well," I said, "tell me."

"You know," he said quietly. "You know that I love her."

"And so it is true. Have you told her?"

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He threw back his head haughtily.

"Madame! how can you ask me such a thing? Have I not honor? She never dreams of it. As for me, it can never, perhaps, be anything but a



" 'I will tell you everything,' he said."

dream—a dream of Heaven: something to remember as one does a prayer. Oh! I am the most unfortunate of men! Why can't I lay aside scruples and claim happiness, or at least do what I can to attain it? What is conscience? What is right and wrong? Why fight what may, after all, prove

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to be a windmill? If you only knew, Madame! If you only knew!"

He left me and paced to and fro, his face in his hands, distraught. I sat motionless, overwhelmed with this disaster, stung with remorse that I had allowed such a situation to develop. I felt dumb before a torrent about to break its bounds and sweep barriers away. A heavy silence fell. Something like a sob struck through the darkness, as though wrung from a grief so profound as to mock at consolation. At last he threw himself beside me.

"I will tell you everything," he said. "It is best. At least you shall know me as I am. But I beg you, dear Madame, to promise me you will not tell her."

I patted his cold hand as I would have soothed my own son.

"Tell me everything. Secrets corrode the heart. I am your friend. You may trust me as fully as I believe in you."

"It is a long story, Madame. It began at my birth. You may have guessed there were things hidden. Monturbia is not all my name. I am Prince Faustino Monturbia di Toranò."

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"Son of Prince Pauldino di Torano of Rome?" I exclaimed, in astonishment. "Brother of the Cardinal?"

"Yes, Madame. I am his only child."

"Then you bear one of the greatest names in Italy, and I know your Palazzo—the most splendid in Rome. Tell me, my friend, why are you masquerading here?"

"That is my story, Madame. My mother died when I was seven. My father centered all his love and pride of race in me. I was trained in all the mediævalism and egotism of our house; but when I grew to manhood, I grew beyond them. I am a Modern. My father believes that those who bear our name are not of the same flesh and blood as lesser mortals. I love my fellow-men, and feel myself one of them. He thinks we can do no wrong so long as we hold ourselves aloof from the common paths trodden by other men. I wanted to walk with my brothers—to help where I could. My father could not understand that I wanted to give because so much had been given to me. I stifled in our palaces. I feasted, knowing that others lacked bread."

"Had he no pity for the poor?"

"Oh, yes! in an impersonal fashion. He gave alms, but that is not the charity which Christ taught. They want sympathy and understanding. My father demanded that I ignore such conditions. I could not. He begged, implored, then threatened. We had scenes at the memory of which I shudder; bitter words, injustice on both sides. We loved each other, and we were breaking each other's hearts. It was horrible!"

"You poor child!" I said. "It sounds like the Middle Ages."

"Yes! At last my father's wrath overcame his love. One night he bade me go out into the world, with which I had more sympathy than with him. He told me, with contempt, to try what human brotherhood would do for me: to live as the poor, and with them. Perhaps it would cure my madness. He wished never to see me again until I could return repentant. Oh! I see him now, Madame, his white head—his trembling finger pointing me from the room where I had played as a child with my beautiful mother. And so I went; and in going, I lost, of course, all power of usefulness. Sympathy without money and power goes but a short way on the road of helpfulness. I was un-

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fitted for work, ignorant of the world outside the garden which had sheltered me. I became a burden to myself, and feared horribly that I might become a burden to others. Work was hard to find. There were so many more efficient than I. I am undone. I cannot go back unless it is to live a lie. That I cannot do. I am adrift, lonely, and in despair."

He paused. What words could I find to assuage such pain? He sat motionless, staring into the darkness.

"*Cher ami*," I said gently, "there was an Englishman named Henley, poor, forsaken, lying on a bed of torture in a London hospital. He said—

" 'Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

" 'In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud;
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

.

" 'I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.'

"I cannot remember the rest, but his courage calls to yours."

"And mine shall answer!" he said, raising his head. "Besides, any night is not black from pole to pole, for she came like a star climbing a storm-reached sky. I did not realize until it was too late. Alas! the folly of it! She is so sweet! like a lily in a shady place. I worship her. I hunger for her. She is hidden deep in the very sanctuary of my soul, where holy things are cherished. Oh! you don't know! you can't know! It is a blessing and a grief. It is a solace and an added torture. I can only leave her. She must not know, and I am no longer strong enough to hide it."

"Is there no other way out of this maze of misfortune?" I asked.

He raised haggard eyes to mine.

"I can see none. I may not even try to win her. I have not the right."

"But time passes, and conditions alter," I said hesitatingly.

"Yes! I know what you would say, Madame. But one cannot build hopes of happiness on the death of those one loves. Besides, my father is

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like a vigorous oak, virile in body and mind. And she is so young and so lovely. Other men can win while I wait. Ah! that is the temptation. The thought torments me night and day, that I might betray my own soul and claim happiness. Perhaps I am wrong in my arrogance of righteousness, and it is all vain delusion for which I sacrifice every joy. I am torn with contention. My brain is a maelstrom of denials and questions."

Feeling like a modern Eve bidding Adam taste the memorable apple, I leaned forward.

"Why not give up the struggle?" I asked. "Where there is a doubt, take the natural course. Your father, your position, have their claims."

Monturbia rose, and stood before me.

"I have no real doubts. Nothing and no one could dissuade me: not even Love. Truth has no tricks; neither is she to be tricked. If I go back, it would be with a clear knowledge of my own guilt, and that, by the truth which shines clearly in my soul, I will not do. Better die fighting the enemy than to feast in his camp."

"Forgive my unworthy thought," I exclaimed with contrition, and I had the grace to blush in the

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darkness. "You are right. The only thing to do is to go away. No good comes of parleying. But you must let me help you. I have influential friends. My cousin is interested in large enterprises over here, and lives in Paris. He must and shall find you occupation. And then we will see."

He took both my hands and kissed them.

"If! if I could only work, Madame. Work! how gladly I would do my best. I will accept such a favor with all my gratitude. How can I——"

But I broke in on his thanks.

"You will go away to-morrow, early, before anyone is up. I will make your excuses. It will be safer. Luckily my friend has the portrait of your head sufficiently completed. Write to me, and do not despair. I stand your friend. I could wish no better thing for Lillian than to be the wife of the man you have proved yourself to be. You do her honor, and I am glad to have known the integrity of your soul."

I gave him my hand, which he held in a firm grip for a long moment, looking down into my eyes with his lips moving.

"You—you—" he said brokenly. "How can

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I thank you? You have shown me hope where all was hopeless. I will work. I feel that I can move mountains. Guard her, cherish her, and may Heaven bless you both!"

He was gone. I looked up at the stars blinking through interlacing branches, feeling a bit dazed. What a gift was such a love: a treasure beyond computing. It must not, it should not be wasted.

Like a thief in the night, I crept into the house and up the stairs undiscovered. It was nearly one; a most improper hour for a well-brought-up young woman to be *tête-à-tête* in the garden with a young man. I tip-toed to Lillian's door, and, finding it ajar, looked in. To my astonishment, a quiet voice said:

"Is it you? Why aren't you asleep?"

I went in. She lay among her pillows tranquilly wide awake, her long golden braids across her breast. She looked a pre-Raphaelite saint in the pale light from the star-lit space of the open windows. I sat down on the edge of the bed, feeling like a conspirator. Should I tell her now? Behind the gaze of those wide, blue eyes, what lay unrevealed? I suddenly became conscious of the abyss which eternally divides human beings from

one another. This young girl, so intimately associated with my daily life—what did I really know of her inner self, the ego which inhabited her fair body? But I loved her dearly, and breathed a prayer of thankfulness that this “white flower of a blameless life” was as yet untouched by the passion which had wrought such havoc with the man who loved her.

She should, however, be told of his departure. It might save embarrassment later. So, drawing one of her hands between my own, I said casually:

“By the way, I had a chat with the Archangel, and was sorry to learn that he has suddenly been called away—some business, I believe. He leaves early in the morning, and left his good-byes for me to give by proxy.”

She lay quite still. Perhaps it was the light, but for a moment her pure pallor seemed to blanch to the whiteness of the pillow. Then she gently withdrew her hand. Her slender fingers clasped one another across the golden braids.

“And he is not coming back?” she asked at last in an even voice.

“No, I believe not. At least, he said nothing about it.”

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The room was very still. The filmy curtains swayed inward, allowing the starlight to glitter on the silver toilette accouterments of the dressing-table. The white lids fell over the blue eyes; then they suddenly opened wide, and fixed me with so clear a gaze that my guilty soul fled to cover.

"Why did he go?" she asked.

"I told you," I stammered, with a strong desire to run away.

"Oh, no! You made his excuses, but business was not the reason. Do you know the real reason?"

I sat tongue-tied.

"The real reason is because he loves me," she said.

"Loves you!" I cried. "How do you know?"

"I know, because I love him," she said serenely.

"Lillian! What do you mean?"

"Just what I say, dear. He loves me, and I have loved him since the moment I looked up and saw him standing on the threshold the night he came."

She sat upright, throwing her long braids behind her, and, leaning forward, clasped her knees.

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"Yes, I love him!" she said, looking before her, as though I was merely a shadow in the room. "I love him with all my heart and soul. He is my world, my life. I am alive at last, and it is glorious."

She turned her shining eyes upon me, where I sat, too dumfounded to speak. And this was my fledgling, my flower untouched by human passion! Her face fairly illumined the darkened room, transfigured, glorified. Dante's words, on glimpsing Paradise, came to my mind:

"I saw a point, whence flashed so sharp a light,
That he on whom its burning glow was turned,
To shun its splendor, needs must close his sight."

Taking her in my arms, I hid that shining face against my breast, and so we remained for a long moment. At last she disengaged herself.

"And you are wondering why I don't cry aloud because he is gone. In going, he tells me that he loves me. Now I know, and am content."

"But, my darling girl, you know nothing of him."

"I know the man. It is enough."

"He is poor."

"He has made me rich in happiness."

"His training is diametrically opposed to all your traditions and education."

"His tolerance has taught me charity. His knowledge shames my ignorance."

"You may never be anything to one another."

"We are everything to one another, though we never meet again."

"How can you trust him when he has never told you?"

"Love is faith, and faith is belief in things unseen."

"It may ruin your life, this vision which has no surety."

"He has taught me to live, and it is the one reality among fleeting shadows."

I was dumb, and could only gaze at her illumined face in veneration of such pure love. So must the gods have loved before they descended from Olympus. I held her close. "Oh, my dear—my dear!" I breathed against her hair. My worldly knowledge stood abashed before such wisdom of love.

She took my face between her two hands.

“Do you know that, did he but hold out his hand and bid me come, nothing could stop my flying feet? I would go out into the wide world, happy and proud to work humbly by his side. Poverty and isolation from all I once held necessary would count as nothing beside the honor of sharing his hardships. My old life, with its petty egotisms, seems like a cocoon from which I am delivered. He has shown me a world bounded by no horizon; where material things count as dross beside ideals. He has opened my heart, yes; but he has also opened the door of my soul, and shown me holy mysteries there. He has taught me that each of our bodies is a shrine, enclosing Divinity, and the dignity of such a heritage. Whether with him or forever apart, I carry his message, here, in my heart, and nothing can ever make me forget.”

She fell back among her pillows, her face in shadow. What remained for me to say? Nothing. As once before, I realized that I had been cheated of Life's meaning, shut out from a woman's rightful heritage; and I envied her with pain and bitterness. She fondled my hand as I leaned to kiss her good-night.

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“Don’t fancy me unhappy,” she said smiling. “It will only be an outward loneliness. The real Lillian can never be lonely again.”

Once more in my room, I knelt by the window, humbled and ashamed. How little had I known this young girl. With all my tenderness for her and perspicacity, how little had I divined beneath the superficial frankness of our daily life together! Were we all such unknown quantities to one another? Was the hunger of my own heart a secret, too, never to be shared, perhaps? How perfectly had she learned the art of giving! Without a thought of self, without a backward glance or reservation, she poured the full richness of her young life into a stranger’s keeping. No weighing there; no question of expediency. In ignorance she had given all. Where I had groped, she had seen unerringly. It was a great temptation to tell all I knew, but my promise held me. Perhaps some day, when she bore his great name, and together they had the power to stoop from their pinnacle of worldly honors to help those below them, what joy to know that only Love had counted.

What a radiant life would be theirs! What a

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lovely Princess would he take to his grim old Roman palace! It must, it should be! I would not rest until this idyl became realized. If happiness was to pass me by, at least I could help insure it for others.

CHAPTER X

THE MAYORESS'S INVASION

THE next day at dawn the soldiers marched away to martial music, leaving behind them warm thanks, a depleted garden, and household confusion. Margaret was disconsolate at the sudden departure of her Archangel, but consoled herself with the fact that the beautiful head on canvas was nearly completed. Lord Ashburne received the news in ominous silence, and announced his own departure by that evening's train. This information his hostess received with equanimity, saying that, as he had appeared to have acquired the habit of returning, she would refrain from dust and ashes for the present.

That afternoon, as we were sitting about the tea-wagon in the Linden Walk, Alwyn appeared, walking blindly toward me, blowing on a pin-wheel, which refused to rotate.

"You've bent the pin too short," I said, and

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proceeded to take it apart while the others watched. The bit of paper lay in my hand. It was covered with writing—verses, evidently hot off the griddle of the muse, as words had been erased here and there.

“What have we here?” I cried. “Poetry! Shall I read?”

Ashburne leaned forward, and tried to take it from me, but I held it aloft.

“How rude of you,” he said. “I had just gotten to the best part of my story, and insist on being heard.”

“Never mind his story,” said Margaret. “I’ve heard it before. On with the poetry. Is it French?”

Ashburne moved to rise, but Margaret laid a detaining hand on his arm.

“Don’t be a spoiled child, Bud. Now! we’re waiting.”

I smoothed out the paper and read:

“‘Love’s Seasons.’ Ahem! Sentimental!

“ ‘When on my Love’s white brow dark frowns appear,
’Tis Winter in my heart, and skies are drear.

Shadows fall gray between all joy and me,
And Cupid hies away most dolorously.’ ”

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"One foot too many in that last line," said Margaret.

"Don't trip me up with it, if there is," said I, and continued:

" ' But when amid the violets of her eyes
A smile is born of tears, all dolor flies,
It's sunshine in my heart makes blithesome Spring.
Cupid a pæan of joy doth gayly sing.

" ' The peace and beauty of full Summertide
Among the roses of her lips abide.
There tenderness and gentle favors dwell
Wrapped in soft petals, which I love full well.

" ' Rich Autumn's bounty glows amid her hair.
Her heart a vintage is of Love so rare,
To taste its sweetness is to drink again,
That heart and soul their rapture may retain.

" ' But Winter's snows and Spring's most fickle smile
My worship from her shrine can ne'er beguile.
I lay Life's Summer roses at her feet,
And garner in Love's harvest, e'er to keep.' "

"Bravo!" cried Lillian.

" 'Feet' and 'keep' don't rhyme," said Margaret.

"Alwyn," I asked, "where did you get this?"

"It isn't out of anything!" he replied. "I found it under Bud's window on the box-hedge. It must have blown out."

"Why, Bud!" ejaculated Margaret. "And it's in your writing! What on earth——"

He waved a negation with his hand.

"Oh, nothing," he said airily. "Some old unfinished stuff——"

"It can't be old," corrected Alwyn. "It's on our château paper. And who is your Love? I thought you only had our Margaret, but her eyes aren't violet. Now, Dear's eyes——"

He peered into my crimson face.

"Yes, they are!" he cried triumphantly. "But she isn't your Love, either, because I heard her tell Cousin Lillian that your Love lived in a castle in Spain."

"And what else did she say, old chap?" asked Ashburne, plainly delighted to shift embarrassment to my shoulders.

I gave my son a suggestive prod.

"It's supper——"

But he ignored me.

"She said something about your being backward in going forward, and Cousin Lillian said she

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didn't understand why Margaret hadn't snapped you up long ago."

"Quite right, my boy. Lack of taste on her part, I call it."

Alwyn turned to Margaret.

"Why didn't you snap him up?" he asked affectionately.

"I'll tell you why," Ashburne cut in. "You know she can't have but one husband at a time, and she told me she was married already."

Alwyn opened round eyes.

"She married! Who to?"

"She told me," said Ashburne, "that she was wedded to Art. So what could I do, but just turn into a friend?"

"Your imagination does you credit," said Margaret, with a wrathful eye on my son. "You were never anything else but my friend."

"I was——" protested Ashburne.

"You didn't know the difference," she replied.

"Oh! don't I?" he retorted.

Margaret smiled significantly.

"Then you've learned something since."

I laid a firm grasp on Alwyn, and rose.

"Personalities are in bad taste," said I over my

shoulder, as I moved away, "and a bad example to the young."

After Alwyn was safely occupied with his supper, there still remained time for a stroll in the forest. I had reached the moat when I heard the paddling of feet on the other side of the wall. Then a rush and scramble, and Ashburne landed on the dead leaves before me.

"I'm coming," said he.

"You appear to have done so," said I.

"As I am going away, you might be a bit more appreciative of my efforts to enjoy your society," said he.

"Your efforts were worthy of a better cause," I replied.

"You might at least make believe you are sorry," he said, swinging his stick viciously among the bracken, as we walked along.

"You once told me I should show truly what I felt, and that make-believe was a contemptible, feminine attribute."

"Do you also remember other things I said?" he asked, bending to look beneath my hat-brim.

"A long memory is an inconvenience," I said. "It harbors inconsistencies."

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Silence fell between us. The beauty of a dying world lay hushed about us. It was early October, and already emerald was turning to mellow tints of brown and orange. Wider spaces showed between thinning branches. The peace of coming Death brooded in the still air, through which leaves drifted as though tired from their summer's frolic. Autumn mists blurred mysterious distances, through which golden shafts of light pierced, effulgent, palpitating.

Pacing along, each busy with thoughts, we reached the pine knoll. The eternal song whispered high above our heads. A hawk swung against the sky on motionless wings. The sun lay warm about us, bringing out a thousand scents, resinous and pungent. I curled up in my favorite hollow, while Ashburne stretched himself on the pine needles. I felt tired; too tired to quibble and play with words. Life at the moment seemed difficult; a twisted thing of threads snarled as though by a malicious destiny.

"Well," said my companion, with eyes fixed on the top of a swaying pine. "Have you nothing to tell me?"

"No!" said I.

"Monturbia made you promise not to tell?"

Silence.

"How much do you know?" he asked, with a shrewd glance at my averted face.

"How much do you know?" I asked.

"Everything, but the latest edition, for I did not see him after he decided to go. But with my knowledge of him, and my knowledge of feminine wiles, I am sure he told you everything before he went."

"Yes, he told me."

"Everything?"

"Yes, everything."

"And she——?"

"I never knew such joy."

He sighed.

"Yes, I suppose so. They are both that kind. One envies them their whole-hearted spontaneity of youth. But what is to be done?"

"He has gone to my cousin, who is a financial power, and to whom I have just mailed ten pages of supplication and command to give Monturbia occupation."

"Then you believe in my friend?"

"With all my heart, and in his future, also."

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"Thank you, Madame. But does she care for him? If so, it is awkward."

"Not at all," said I somewhat tartly. "I see nothing in the least awkward."

My companion tossed into the air his handful of pine needles, and regarded me with smiling astonishment.

"That from you, O worldly one! Verily if love at second hand can accomplish such wonders with your skepticism, at first hand what wonders might not transpire?"

There seemed nothing to be said to this, so I remained silent. Ashburne followed the erratic course of an ant, with absent eye.

"You then believe that, after all, perfect love casteth out fear?" he said impersonally.

"Yes, but when does one find perfect love?"

"You and I know of two hearts which understand it. There may be others. One often overlooks what is near at hand, in searching for uncertainties."

"But one must be cautious," I replied, "and not mistake pinchbeck for pure gold. One meets such good imitations of the article."

"I thought women held a divining rod regarding such things."

"Dear me, no! A woman is often led to believe, because she wishes to do so. The feminine heart is prone to deceive itself."

"Then to beget belief in the sincerity of his love, a man must first artfully convince a woman that she needs to love and be loved?"

Was there a note of satirical contempt in his voice? His gray eyes held mine, as though compelling sincerity.

"Out upon such subtleties, dear Madame. One cannot quibble with love any more than one plays ball with a star. Being a mere man, I believe in more direct methods: in loving straight from the heart, as one fights, straight from the shoulder. To love, to work, to forgive an enemy, to hate what is ignoble; these must be done with the whole heart and undivided will, or not at all. Pettiness is never worth while. You know that you really agree with me. Tell me, why do you fence? Will you never drop your guard?"

"I am not——" I began, feeling that unknown issues were hurrying to a solution too rapidly. Caution bade me go warily.

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He sat up, and, leaning forward, laid one brown hand on the edge of my dress.

"You are fencing. You always do. You evade. Why? Of what are you afraid? Tell me."

I sat dumb, with lowered lids. What was this tumult of rising joy and hope in my heart—this breaking down of barriers within, which years of worldly training had raised between me and faith? I glanced at the strong hand on the edge of my dress. Its touch seemed to pervade; to promise strength to my weakness, and a thousand unimagined joys.

"Tell me," he said softly, "or shall I tell you?"

"No! no!" I cried, evading the issue. "Why analyze and explain? One cannot dissect such things. They belong to one's subliminal consciousness, which has the reticence of the unknown quantity."

"You run away from the issue. You are afraid."

There was contempt in his voice. It lashed my pride. No doubt my feminine tactics were contemptible. Could I not meet honesty with truth; return confidence, where so freely given? Oh! to be free! To dare to stand erect, to the full stature of one's nature, unhampered by caution and

expediency. I suddenly longed to come out into the open, unafraid: to unleash primal instincts.

"Forgive me!" I cried impulsively. "You compel my honesty. Yes! I am a coward; the world has taught me fear. I am afraid, but not so much of others as of myself—my own capacities. I fear disillusion; kindling a flame which might consume—of exchanging placid content for joy which might end in pain. I have more to give than others, never having given lightly. To give one's all, forever, and to find it tossed aside—to empty one's heart and not to find it filled——"

His hand closed over mine. I felt it tremble.

"Dear——" he began, and stopped. He looked down at my hand in silence for a moment, and then gently laid it back on my knee.

"And so you do not believe," he said. "What am I to say? Do words prove anything? Are they not in the mouths of liars, as well as in those of honest men? I would not stoop to argue. I love you. In those three words the whole matter lies. Had I the eloquence of Demosthenes, I could say no more. And you fear that, if you blessed me in loving me, you might one day regret the gift; that I might cease to cherish it.

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Have I learned so little in this empty and lonely world? Alas! in so doubting, you prove your lack of understanding. The world has, indeed, blurred your vision, when you cannot see my heart on its knees before you, pleading, undone, so wholly yours that it can never be mine again."

What was it that held me tongue-tied? I shall never know. Was it the pæan of joy, singing within, to which my ravished ears listened? Or was it doubt still holding back the key to my heart? Fenelon's prayer came to my mind: "O God, take my heart, for I cannot give it to Thee. Keep it, for I cannot keep it for Thee. Save me, in spite of myself." Had he, too, longed for self-abandonment? With words mounting, stumbling to my lips, with the last barrier crumbling to its fall, the moment passed.

A shadow fell between us, blotting out the glory of the setting sun. I looked up. The Mayor's wife stood before us!

My companion sprang to his feet, with something which sounded shockingly like a naughty word. I, too, scrambled erect, feeling every soft sentiment fly shuddering from my breast. There she was! a most unwelcome fact of two hundred

solid pounds, black as to raiment, but blacker still as to expression of countenance.

"To what are we indebted for this pleasure?" asked Ashburne, with stony sarcasm.

She ignored him.

"I am come, Madame, to discuss a matter of extreme importance, which admits of no delay. They told me at the house that you were out, but I persuaded your gardener's son to show me the way."

"Whatever it is," I replied, "it can wait until we return to the house, where we can at least find something to sit upon."

With small effort at concealing my wrath, I led the way down the slippery incline to the path. Ashburne brought up the rear, while our unwelcome visitor puffed and blew, as I sped maliciously along at a speed which ill suited her elephantine footsteps. If she had fallen in a fit *en route*, I doubt if either of us would have offered a succoring hand.

Not a word was said. As my wrath cooled, I began to wonder what might be in store for us. It was not difficult to surmise that Henriette might be the cause of this abominable invasion, and so it

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proved. As we emerged upon the lawn, our visitor said, between gasping breaths:

"Will you kindly send for your maid, as what I have to say should be said in her presence?"

We went to the library, where Ashburne, having offered the frailest and least comfortable chair to our guest, muttered an excuse, and departed. I rang the bell, and Henriette appeared. She carried a pair of curling-tongs in one hand, and from her diminutive apron pocket there floated a yard of pink lingerie ribbon. Her pretty face hardened on recognizing our visitor, and, I regret to say, she gave her a saucy stare of defiance as she stood respectfully awaiting my orders. There was a moment's silence; then, as the Mayoress seemed at a loss, I said:

"Madame wishes to speak to you about something, Henriette, and asked me to send for you."

The Mayoress awoke from her torpor, and, fixing her beady orbs on my maid, demanded:

"Is it true that my son Jean has asked you to marry him, and that you have accepted him?"

Henriette bobbed a courtesy.

"No, Madame. There isn't a word of truth in it."



“It is not true, because it was I who proposed to Jean’.”

“What do you mean!” exclaimed the Mayoress, with fallen jaw. “My son has just told me so.”

“Madame is mistaken.”

“Do you mean to tell me that you and my son are not engaged?”

“Not at all. We are.”

“Then in the name of the holy saints, what do you mean?”

“Did not Madame ask me whether it was true

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that her son had asked me to marry him, and I accepted him?"

"Those were my words."

"Madame will pardon my correcting her. It is not true, because it was I who proposed to Jean, and he who accepted me!"

The Mayoress stared at the small figure before her with bulging eyes.

"How dare you tell me such a thing?" she finally gasped.

Henriette opened wide blue eyes.

"Dare? I do not understand."

Her cheerful serenity acted like the flick of a whip on the Mayoress. Her face grew gray. Her eyes narrowed to pin-points of malevolence.

"Do you suppose for a moment that I shall allow my son to marry a servant, a girl of no parentage, a penniless nobody, a worthless——"

This was too much for me, and I raised my voice.

"This girl is in my employ, Madame, which vouches for her entire respectability and efficiency. You asked to see me, but I must decline to listen to this sort of thing. You will excuse me."

Out in the court was heard the motor's pant-

ing, as it stopped before the door. There were hurrying feet within the house. Ashburne was leaving. What perverse Fate had arranged this situation? Were we to part with so much unsaid? Not even good-bye! How was he to guess at what had been trembling on my lips—at barriers broken down at last? I heard a firm tread on the marble pavement of the hall, and Margaret's kind voice urging him to hasten, or he would miss the train. I rose.

The voices in the room had become echoes to my beating heart. He stood in the doorway, hat in hand. Beyond were the others, tactfully engaged with one another and the luggage. His face was quite impassive as he took my cold hand into his warm clasp. His eyes, holding mine, held a message I could not fathom.

"Good-bye," he said pleasantly. "May peace be with you and with this house, and may no more adventures disturb your tranquillity."

I smiled bravely, not to be out-done in self-possession, but with a wild desire to know what message his eyes struggled to give, as they held mine. Was it indeed "Good-bye"? Had he not seen? Could he not guess? The friendly chatter

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and laughter about us, with its background of acrid voices from the room behind me, divided us as completely from each other as China's wall.

"Bon voyage," I said, leaving my hand in his for a moment. "You have been our mascot, and we hope you will not lose your habit of returning."

He hesitated, as though on the point of saying something, but, evidently thinking better of it, turned away, and, with a final good-bye, the motor chortled out of the court, he waving his hat till it had spun out from the arch into the street beyond.

"Oh, dear," wailed Margaret, "I'm afraid he has gone for good this time, for he made no more excuses for coming back. I hope no one has dared to treat him badly."

She looked suspiciously at me. I felt myself redden. With what I fondly hoped was an airy laugh, I fled back to the library, where the battle still raged. Henriette cast me a grateful glance as I sat down with disgusted reluctance. My head was in a whirl; my heart like lead. It appeared that I was better able to manage other people's affairs than my own.

There was a pause in hostilities, while they

eyed each other like a pair of pugilists waiting for "time" to be called.

"Now, Madame!" said Henriette, with an air of readiness for the second round.

"Do you know that my son shall not have a penny, if he marries without my consent?"

"Oh! yes, Madame. Jean said you were like that."

"Like what?"

"Like that. Loving money more than happiness—not meaning to be disrespectful, Madame."

"And yet, you no doubt expect that I shall change my mind and consent to this abominable union."

"Not at all, Madame. That is why I proposed to Jean. I couldn't get him to do it, though I did try in every way. He said that, being a hunchback and poor, he wasn't good enough for me."

This view of the case evidently staggered the future mother-in-law.

"Not good enough!" she exclaimed, her face purple with amazement. "Not good enough—you——!"

"That was what he said, Madame, but of course I didn't agree with him any more than you do."

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"And what do you two precious doves expect to live on?"

"Plain but nourishing food, Madame."

The Mayoress snorted.

"Who is to pay for it?"

"Oh, we'll chip in," said Henriette airily. "I can support myself, and have a snug sum laid by. He can earn, too, carving ivories. Even if he couldn't, I don't in the least mind supporting your son if his family can't manage it."

"You then mean to defy me?"

"I mean to marry Jean and to make him happy. He never has been."

Her lip quivered. A steely light sprang into her eyes.

"Yes!" she said. "I'm going to give him everything you should have given, and never did."

"I'm not here to listen to your future plans," broke in the Mayoress. "I'm here to tell you that, if you persist in your brazen impudence and marry my son against my wishes, he ceases to be any son of mine. If you wish to impoverish him and cut him off from his family and home, the sin be on your own head!"

Then Henriette's gay serenity left her. In an

instant she was transformed into a small white fury. She went close to the Mayoress.

"You! you! to talk of his home! He never had one, nor a mother, either. I'll tell you what he has had: a lonely, unloved existence. Never tenderness or pity, nor sympathy for his misfortune. All the world knows that your husband and son detest you as the devil hates holy water. You never knew how to hold your husband. He runs from you to other women, and small blame to him. No man likes to live with the Ten Commandments dressed up in black bombazine."

She raised the curling tongs and flourished them within an inch of the Roman nose above her.

"It is this, and this," waving the pink lingerie ribbon before the empurpled countenance, "which hold a man: not virtue and alpaca petticoats. If you, Madame, had kept your waist, powdered your nose, and learned how to laugh, your husband wouldn't be running to Paris to find those who do. As for Jean, he shall know the value of such things. If the good God does me the honor to make me his wife, I'll see to it that his eye is filled as well as his stomach. I'll make up to him for the sawdust you gave him instead of human joy.

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You may turn him out as much as you like. I wager it won't be his mother he'll be crying for nights. *Et voila!*"

She stopped from sheer lack of breath. Of course it was shocking, but for the life of me I could not repress a desire to give three cheers. The Mayoress stalked to the door, and paused on the threshold, with black-gloved hands uplifted.

"The devil looks after his own, so I can wash my hands of the matter. You will rue this day. May your bread be ashes and your wine vinegar. I hope never to see your face again."

"Give Jean all my love," was Henriette's parting shot.

"Well, my girl," I said, "I fear you have been indiscreet."

She stood staring at me, while the light of battle faded from her eyes. Her lip trembled, then she threw herself down at my knees, wringing her hands and shaking with sobs.

I patted her soothingly, while my thoughts flew. Poor child! What a loyal heart beat beneath the smart little bodice!

"What shall I do?" she wailed, lifting tear-wet eyes.

"Elope!" said I.

"Madame!"

Hope dawned in her face. Her saturated pocket-handkerchief disappeared into her apron pocket.

"Yes, elope," I said with conviction. "It is the solution. I don't know the law's requirements, but I'll stand by, and we'll manage it. But remember, Henriette—it is a profound secret. Don't you breathe it to a living soul but Jean."

"May all the saints bless you, Madame. As for the law, Jean told me. We are both of age, and can do as we please, publishing the banns in Paris, where no one knows us."

"And then you can both come back here and live in those empty rooms over the arch, till we can turn round and arrange matters. You can open a little shop in Paris. You can make ravishing blouses, and Jean can sell his ivories. I'll see that my friends buy both. The man who sold me that antique furniture at ruinous prices sells such things. I'll give him to understand that if he doesn't sell Jean's carvings, it will be a bad day for his American trade. Yes! so it shall be. You

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will both live happily ever after, and may the devil catch the Mayoress."

Henriette covered my hands with kisses. One would never have imagined she had ever been acquainted with grief. Her face was once more all dimples and roses. She fairly danced from the room.

The château appeared to be something of a matrimonial bureau. It was good to be alone at last, and I thanked a kindly Providence, as, from an open window, I saw Margaret and Lillian sauntering toward the *potager*. The room was very still. A bee had drifted in from the roses outside, and buzzed and bumped against the vaulted ceiling high above my head. I leaned back in the high, carved chair, and watched, with unseeing eyes, the shafts of yellow sunlight gleam across the beautiful room, touching here a brilliant bit of embroidery or copper vase, to lose itself in shadowy corners. Birds twittered in the vines about the windows. Children's voices fell on the quiet air.

He was gone. What else mattered? In going, had he shut the door of his heart, closed me out of the Paradise I had been too slow to enter?

Tears rose to my eyes. For the first time in my life, I knew what moral loneliness meant, and felt lost in its chilling and pervading gloom. Like a child in the dark, I longed to cry out: "Come back! Come back! I will be good."

My life, which, a few short weeks before, had seemed an unbroken path of tranquil prosperity, now yawned like an abyss before me, from which I shrank shuddering. I had turned Love away from fear of pain, and lo! pain was here, searing and keen. Where was Love? Had he spread his wings and flown to where a warmer welcome would bid him enter?

To have had so precious a gift offered royally, with complete magnificence of generosity; and how had it been received? With head bowed in humble gratitude, with eager hands outstretched? To have dallied with such treasure, while cold reason whispered caution! What an impertinence!

And yet I had meant to be frank. Was it Fate which tangled the threads Love was weaving into a shining woof, which should have wrapped me in warmth and beauty?

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I turned my head wearily to and fro against the carved back of my chair, while tears burned against my closed lids. Alas! had the Mayoress delayed but two moments in her invasion, what might not have been saved!

CHAPTER XI

“AND SO THEY WERE MARRIED”

THE days which followed were shod with lead. The beautiful world which he had taught me to see and understand seemed an empty place, where everything was an echo of scenes, words, and incidents of which he had been the crux. I avoided the forest as though ghouls haunted its glades. The Linden Walk, where drifted leaves formed a carpet, seemed a vault of dead memories.

Whether Margaret and Lillian guessed the truth of the situation, seemed doubtful. Lillian went on her quiet way with a serene face. Except for a new silence and absorption, she was the same. We became nearer and dearer to one another, and if I envied her exaltation, her sweetness was balm to my wound. Margaret was too absorbed now in her work to notice anything beyond her studio walls. She received pleasant letters from “Bud,” which were read aloud. He always

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sent kind messages to Lillian and me, and added the hope that at last the repose for which we had longed was ours.

I had confided Henriette's matrimonial intentions to Margaret and Lillian, who applauded her pluck to the skies. We had a long talk with Jean, who appeared to appreciate the gravity of the situation less than the perfections of his enslaver.

It was decided that, to avoid unpleasantness at home, they should be married in Paris at the end of the month. If any parental forgiveness was to be vouchsafed, it might wait until the knot was tied. He insisted, however, on confiding in the Mayor, assuring us that his father had well learned the art of keeping a secret from his lawful spouse. Jean also assured us that, while the Mayor was much too well disciplined to act contrary to her commands, he would undoubtedly take it in good part. And so it proved.

A few evenings later, as I was sauntering along the road which leads to Manteuil, horse's feet were heard. The Mayor dismounted, and walked beside me in the twilight.

He approached the subject with some diffidence, but made it clear that he was entirely in sympathy

with the idyl. When I unfolded my plan of the shop, he so far forgot his terrors of his wife's displeasure, as to guarantee the rent!



"The Mayor dismounted, and walked beside me in the twilight."

I was delighted and surprised, knowing how relieved Jean would be to learn that at least one member of his family sympathized. It was with

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some embarrassment and real feeling that the Mayor specified reasons for his kindness.

"You see, Madame, I owe my son a debt of which he is ignorant. My wild youth, those years of license—my sins have been visited upon my son, and only the merciful God knows of my remorse. If I have certain trials, I cannot complain. My punishment on earth may shorten my punishment beyond. My life is not of a happiness to be envied by any man. Therefore, it is not I who can deny my son happiness. I trust, however, that Madame understands that discretion points to silence."

To see this giant's apprehension, was laughable, had it not exposed much that lay concealed. It was arranged that Jean should depart from the parental roof for residence beneath ours without warning. Secrecy was all important. No living soul but ourselves was to know of the day, and even the Mayor was not to be present at the ceremony. To avert his wife's displeasure, he must appear to have been in total ignorance of his son's defection. We three women were to be sole witnesses, and recipients of the wrath to come.

During the following weeks we spent much time

in Paris, buying a suitable trousseau. Hildegarde, having secretly measured certain garments of Jean's, a goodly supply for him was also requisitioned. We all enjoyed unpacking the mysterious parcels which soon inundated Lepine's "stuck-up" wagon. Monograms decorated the piles of snowy linen, real silk petticoats rustled, and brand new trunks were filled with pretty lingerie and smart little costumes. Henriette's joy and gratitude at times overcame her well-trained composure, and more than once I caught her waltzing about my room, duster waving, like a *premiere danseuse*.

Margaret wrote to "Bud" of the impending event, inviting him to the wedding. He replied that important matters would prevent him having that pleasure, but begged the happy pair to accept a "trifle" in token of his esteem, which he sent by express. The "trifle" proved to be a magnificent elephant's tusk of perfect ivory, which Jean regarded as "capital" in more senses than one.

Days sped swiftly. No one saw the Mayor's wife, and outwardly life trundled along in the château and beyond its walls with phlegmatic calm. The secret of the elopement had evidently

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been well guarded, and we anticipated with enjoyment the day when the happy pair should burst upon the social horizon of our village as man and wife.

The wedding day dawned with a cloudless sky. It had been arranged that we three women, with Henriette, were to motor to the station, Jean preceding us on his bicycle in ordinary clothes. As the motor was a rapid conveyance, we did not start till late, for secrecy is the first rule of elopements, as everyone knows.

When we puff-puffed from under the arch, the usual lounging, gossiping villagers failed to appear. Indeed, the street seemed strangely deserted, as though a magic wand had hushed its inhabitants to slumber within their little gray houses. Ducks swam and quacked on the pond; a few dogs lay asleep in the sunshine, but no voices wished us "*Bon jour.*"

We all remarked upon it as we fled along between fields where no harvesters or scythes disturbed the autumn silence. At last the station came in view. I rubbed my eyes. What was that crowd of people? Was the President expected? A band blared music from the grass-plot. Gay

streamers of bunting floated on the breeze, while the "tri-color" made patriotic signals from every corner of the building.

As we approached, familiar faces detached themselves from the mass: the postmistress in her best bib and tucker; Madame Philon, discretion thrown to the winds, brilliant in a peacock-blue foulard and hat of gigantic proportions. The schoolmaster and his wife beamed with importance. Hildegarde and Marie were the only absentees, and even they, too, appeared, whirling down the hill on bicycles in a cloud of dust. All were there: Isidore and his family, smart in celluloid collars and polished boots; my laundress; farm hands; our entire population, all talking and laughing, a babble of gaiety above the music from the band. Truly, this "secret elopement" was run on original lines!

As we descended, a great cheer drowned the band. Jean, holding tightly to Henriette's hand, his face blanched with excitement, assured us by the saints in heaven that neither he nor she had breathed the secret to a living soul. How then had the secret become known? I looked for the Mayor. He was not there. Then I spied

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Madame Philon watching us with an apprehensive eye, and at once I knew the Delilah who had wheedled the secret from the "mighty man."

But how was it possible to criticise, with those kindly, laughing faces, those voices clamoring good wishes, as we climbed into the train, from which amazed faces stared in bewilderment. It was all so gay and kind. It proved how the world loves lovers. Henriette shed a tear of emotional ecstasy into a minute handkerchief as we steamed away, while shouts of "Good luck," and waving hands added to the tumult of color and sound.

The religious ceremony was to take place at the Church of St. Phillippe de Roule in the Faubourg St. Honoré, but first, of course, we had to attend to the civil ceremony before the *maire*. As the law requires six months' residence in the *arrondissement*, previous to the marriage, a special license had been required, but all had been arranged.

It took but a few moments for the civil knot to be tied by the spectacled little Mayor, whose pink face beamed with satisfaction in the beauty of the bride as well as the size of the fee.

Then into the cabs again, and off through the

crowded street to the church, where the priest awaited in the dim, incense-laden gloom.

To see Jean's transfigured face lifted for the final benediction was a goodly thing to remember. A new dignity emanated from the little bride, as we congratulated them after we had signed the register as witnesses. The happy pair were to lunch alone, and then go for that drive in the Bois de Boulogne without which no girl of the French middle class considers herself properly wedded. I excused myself from the others on plea of shopping, hopped into a "taxi," and went to my cousin's offices in the Boulevard Haussman, for news of the Archangel. Luckily he was in. I was conducted by rows of little glass and nickel cubby windows, behind which slim young gentlemen in black coats wrote in ponderous tomes, to the "chief's inner sanctum." Esconcing me in a gigantic leather arm-chair, he proceeded to inundate me with questions before I had a chance of putting in any of my own.

He, too, it seemed, had been puzzled and impressed by Monturbia's personality, his odd combination of haughtiness and humility, intelligence and ignorance of business requirements. But I

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was promise bound, and for once proved that a woman can hold her tongue. He assured me that Monturbia was acting as "foreign correspondent" in London, with entire satisfaction to his firm, showing a tact and intelligence that argued well for his future and a speedy rise in salary. So I departed, in high spirits at the success of my financial speculation, snapping metaphorical fingers at a certain stiff-necked old noble down in Rome.

No explosion followed the return of the bride and groom to the château, save a general ebullition of toasts drunk to their happiness in the little wine-shop where everyone stopped to gossip. The weeks passed in calm repose. At last the quiet for which I had longed was mine, but where, oh, where, was peace? Not in my heart, at all events.

Like a silly school-girl, I watched for the postman and listened with hungry ears as Margaret read aloud "Bud's" letters. Their very cleverness and agreeableness smarted like salt in my wound.

Those leaden days, when gray skies filled the horizon, and dead leaves flew before the wind! You ask why I did not go away. It was beyond my powers to return to Paris and its round of

social inanities. Everything about me had been witness to such happiness. It was like re-reading an engrossing story: I loved to turn again the pages where knightly worship had held me breathless.

There were days of golden splendor, when the blue arched above a world of color which dazzled the eye. The forest drew me once more. I spent long hours there alone, yet not alone; for Memory walked with me through those glades, so living and so dear that it seemed a companion, hand-in-hand with content.

Alwyn was unconsciously a great comfort during these trying hours. He never wearied of the subject. His affection and admiration equaled mine for the hero of doughty deed, the mighty hunter, the "tracker" of Indians, the Knight of the Strong Heart. The boy missed him as much as I did, though in a different way. No shadow of regret or remorse added to his loneliness. We went together to all our former haunts; and while my ears listened to his childish confidences, an inner voice was ever calling, calling. Alas! there was no answer.

Friends from Paris, having learned of our re-

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treat, motored out for luncheon or tea, and filled the house with life and laughter, departing frankly puzzled at my new penchant for the simple life. Once someone spoke of Ashburne to Margaret, regarding a rumor that he was to be appointed Ambassador to Rome. This threw a side-light on his life which put him farther away and out of reach.

I called upon my pride. Here was I fretting for a man out in the busy haunts of men, absorbed, of course, in his ambitions and brilliant existence, among people and scenes with which I had no part. Doubtless, if he remembered me at all, it was merely as an episode in which passing emotions, engendered by circumstances, had played a graceful and fitting part.

And yet I knew this to be a fallacy. I knew at the bottom of my lonely soul that the man's nature had been stirred to its depths, that it had been no mere flowering of fragile passion; and, knowing this, I hugged the conviction to my sore heart. How strong he might be in burying it beneath new occupations, or in rooting it out as a useless and hampering burden, I could not know. Like a squirrel in a cage, my thoughts ran round and

round, arriving at no solution, and finding no resting-place.

But one morning on my breakfast-tray lay a fat envelope, addressed in Ashburne's writing. For a moment I did not dare to touch it, but allowed it to lie against the Dresden coffee-pot, while I stared at it as though bewildered. I did not move till the door had closed on Henriette; then I picked it up with trembling fingers. The windows were wide open to the park, where autumn sunlight lay in misty shafts across the lawn. The robin who came daily to my window for his allowance of crumbs hopped and twittered unnoticed. Clemenceau browsed in the foreground, while Alwyn, with shrill cries, performed cowboy feats on his back. I laid the battered envelope against my cheek. What lay within? Happiness?

At last, gathering courage, I opened the envelope. Out tumbled one brief page from Ashburne, and a letter of many pages to him, from the Archangel. The first was a mere note, saying that the enclosure would explain itself, and was forwarded to me that I might decide what was best to be done. He added that if I wished to

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see him regarding the matter, he would come with pleasure. I laid down the letter, feeling so hurt and snubbed that it was like a physical blow. To have expected a feast and received a crumb. Then my good sense came to my aid. Why should he have written differently? What other thing was he to write? He had no superhuman powers of divination.

Then I took up Monturbia's letter. It was dated Rome, and with growing astonishment, I read:

“PALAZZO DI TORANO,

“Rome, October 11, 1910.

“DEAR ASHBURNE:—

“In my hurried note to you from the office, before leaving London, the details as to the cause of my sudden departure were not given, and, feeling that your kindness deserves frankness, I am glad of this opportunity to explain more fully. As I wrote you, our family lawyer telegraphed me of my father's motor accident and precarious condition. Although he had not asked for me, I at once explained the situation to my employer, who gave me leave of absence. Our lawyer met me at the station in Rome with the sad news that my father was rapidly sinking, that Extreme Unction had been administered, and that I was to go directly to the Palazzo.

"On arriving, the porter at the gate, who had known me from babyhood, kissed my hands with tears on his old face—my only welcome home. The great house seemed full of shadows as we passed along corridors and through the rooms where, as a child, I had played with my beautiful mother. My father lay high on his pillows. His emaciated and powerful face called to my heart, and I knelt as a child by his bed. He seemed asleep, and I was filled with fear that he might pass away into the Unknown without reconciliation. It was hard not to cry out that I was there, with nothing but veneration and love.

"I cannot express to you, dear friend, all I felt and thought kneeling there. Time rolled backward: old bitterness fell away. Only memories of past happiness remained, when we had been much to each other, our mutual belief and pride in one another, his ambitions for my future, which, alas! I had so betrayed. The room was dim with burning candles. Figures came and went, but at last we were alone.

"It was then that, looking up, I found his eyes open and regarding me consciously. His hand moved slowly, with effort, and met mine. I gently raised it and laid it on my bent head. It rested there.

"Can I tell you of the peace which flooded my soul? That fragile hand, ever heavier, seemed a

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link which bound us for all Eternity in mutual love and forgiveness.

"A shadowy smile lit his white face; the eyes closed as though heavy with sleep, and the pallor changed to waxen immobility.

"Death was there; the Angel who carries tired hearts to rest. The benign Presence filled the room and smoothed lines of weariness and pain from the still face on the pillow. A look of youth and peace grew where they had marred its nobility. I knelt with the cold hand against my cheek. Grief for the moment had no place. I did not even feel alone, but rather that we were now nearer to one another than ever before in mutual comprehension and sympathy. I had found, not lost, my father.

"And so, dear friend, I enter on a new life whose responsibilities are heavy. It sobers my youth. It hushes the clamor of personal emotions, this burden which I in my turn take up. Many are dependent upon me for happiness. The interests incumbent upon great wealth must be considered, and settled with justice. The estates are numerous in the city and the provinces, where almost feudal observances still hold. You will understand that I am unable to leave Italy for several weeks.

"And now may I speak of a personal matter? You know that I love the Lily, your friend's

niece, and I wish to do myself the honor of asking her to be my wife. I am as yet ignorant as to her feelings toward me, and doubtful if she cares for me. It is difficult to remain here in ignorance, as you can well understand.

"I am also in ignorance as to the customs of her country regarding such matters. Advise me. I know she is an orphan. I hope she is also without money, that I may have the happiness of giving in material things while she gives me the priceless treasure of her heart.

"Perhaps it were better to allow it to rest until I can go to your friend and ask the hand of her cousin. But one thing I beg of you. She was kind to me as I was: poor, unknown, and unhappy. May I have leave to try to win her in my former capacity? I would not change my personality; to become, as it were, a stranger. I can tell her that I can now support her according to her station in life and can offer her a proper social position, but more than that I beg you to keep from her knowledge.

"You may tell Madame, your charming friend, all I have written you. I shall write her as soon as I hear from you.

"Assuring you of my most profound consideration, and assurance of your sympathy in my loss,

"I remain, dear Ashburne, your friend,

"TORANO."

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The letter fell on the counterpane. A vision of their happiness filled my mind. How truly delightful and idyllic it all was: quite like a story out of a novel. I longed to rush into Lillian's room with the good news. What pleasure to see joy dawn on her face! There flashed through my mind the memory of my drive home from Arle with Ashburne: the crimson sky; the Summer radiance; and his quotation:

“Over the hills and far away,
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
And deep into the dying day—
The happy princess followed him.”

The happy, happy Princess, wrapped round with love and all earthly blessings! God bless her!

Later in the day Margaret was told, and her astonishment almost left her speechless. We discussed all the *pros* and *cons*, upside down and round and round. It seemed hard to leave Lillian in ignorance; but we finally decided that the Archangel should have the pleasure himself of his own wooing. But how to restrain our own emotions and keep sober faces in view of this delightful state of things, was a question.

That night, in the seclusion of my chamber, I wrote eleven different letters to Ashburne and tore them up. The twelfth seemed a satisfactory composition: as dignified, agreeable, and to the point as his own. I told him that Margaret and I had concluded it would be wiser to leave matters as they were until the Archangel (the old name still clung) could speak for himself. Meanwhile, I would get the consent of her Aunt. There might be a little delay in the latter. The Aunt put little faith in princes or in the sons of them, as Bridgeport, Massachusetts, was seldom visited by that commodity. I expressed my own pleasure in this charming denouement, and my belief in their future happiness, adding the hope that he would let me know if anything further transpired.

We took up our life again with outward calm; but beneath, strong currents surged and eddied. We now each carried a secret, and unconsciously drifted into reticence. Outwardly we chattered and laughed as of yore, but often it was false gaiety on my part. As for Lillian, she made no pretense at gaiety; only tranquility. But her face lost its bloom. A look of fragility dimmed her beauty, and the very sweetness of her patience

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and silence seemed unnatural. Spiritual exaltation might be all very well, but the body weakened beneath the strain. I longed to tell her, but feared that, after all, some unforeseen thing might arise to spoil matters, and so held my tongue.

Several letters from the Archangel came, full of impatient anticipation; but nothing more from Ashburne. We read in the papers of his appointment as Ambassador to Rome, with accounts of his brilliant career, and once or twice saw his name among the list of distinguished people at some English house-party or social function. Margaret, absorbed in her work, allowed the correspondence to drop, and so Alwyn and I had only each other with whom to talk of the absent one.

Weeks passed. Bare branches now tossed against bleak skies. The forest now was a thing of sullen silence and shivering glades, where dead leaves lay sodden. I took long walks about the country, often with the rain beating in my face and soaking my hair into tendrils against my cheeks. I was conscious of new beauty in dull colors on every hand, which my eyes saw, but in which my heart took not the smallest pleasure.

The library was a great solace. For the first

time I had the opportunity to read those books which we all intend to enjoy "some day." The contempt of great minds for the ills of life braced my faltering strength. During those long hours before the great fire, in the solitude of that beautiful room, I grew to know myself and to forget much that hampered.

Thanksgiving Day passed with its challenge to digestion, and Christmas drew near. We planned a festive time for all our little world: a Tree in the "white salon," to which all the children of our village and their parents were invited. The schoolmaster trained the children to sing carols in our honor, and Hildegard's imagination mounted to such heights of culinary effort that we trembled for our lives. As the day approached, sundry journeys to Paris were necessary, with lists, as long as your arm, of gifts suitable for each inhabitant within and without our walls.

Ten days before the great Day, Margaret wrote Ashburne, begging him to come for a few days to join in the festivities, and insisted on Lillian and myself attaching our signatures to hers. You may imagine whether or no I watched the postbag after it was sent!! A letter arrived from

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the Archangel, asking if he might be permitted to spend Christmas with us for the adjustment of certain matters of importance. Margaret wired an eager "Yes!" and I sent another on my own account, of such joyful length that the telegraph operator must have drawn mistaken conclusions.

Three days before Christmas, Alwyn rushed into my room one morning and executed a war-dance, shouting: "He's coming! He's coming!"

I snatched at him as he whirled by, and fairly shook him to sobriety.

"Who is coming?" I demanded.

He threw strangling arms about my neck.

"Bud, of course!"

We embraced one another then with equal fervor, while my falling hair hid a face where joy and thankfulness shone with betraying effulgence.

After that the hours flew on golden wings. What pleasure to make the old house beautiful for him! Excursions were made into the forest, from which we returned laden with holly and mistletoe. A giant fir-tree was felled and drawn to the house by oxen. This was erected in the "white salon," and, after Alwyn was safe in bed, Isidore mounted a ladder and hung it from top

to bottom with candles, bags of "goodies," and every known toy capable of suspension.

The day before Christmas Margaret received a wire, saying that our two guests were to meet



"'He's coming! He's coming!'"

in Paris and arrive Christmas afternoon at three. The festivities were to commence at five, so all was as it should be.

The Day dawned bitterly cold and gray, with every evidence of snow, and before noon it came, drifting down through windless air. All was bustle

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and confusion. Delectable odors came from the kitchen, where our Treasure, with her best dress tucked up, issued last orders. Alwyn flew here and there, like an animated jumping-jack, his cheeks like roses and eyes brilliant with excitement. He was to head the procession of children with Marianne, as they marched through the château, singing, to the salon, and he felt the importance of the occasion.

All was ready. Even Lillian had lost her pallor, and my heart seemed to have left its accustomed place in my bosom for my throat, where it beat in stifling throbs.

At last the motor was heard. We ran to the hall door, from which a stream of crimson light threw a welcoming glow across the snowy court. Shout answered shout, as it spun through the arch, and in a moment Ashburne was hugging Margaret with scandalous audacity, while the Archangel, with a white face which seemed to emit a radiance from within, was holding Lillian's hands, while she stood trembling pitifully with downcast eyes.

Then Ashburne turned to me. My hand lay in his firm grasp for a long moment. His eyes searched my face hungrily, his own tremulous with

feeling. Then Margaret whisked them both upstairs, and I was alone.

“He is here! He is here!” sang my happy heart. “He loves me! He loves me!” sang my soul. I knew it as surely as though he had shouted it to me in words, during the moment his eyes had held mine. The joy intoxicated, inundated my being. I had come into my heritage at last. Life became for me a glory. The whole world seemed too narrow to hold my joy. As he had said that night in the Linden Walk: “It must fill the human heart till life’s sordidness is forgotten; yet be so vast and of such mighty strength that one’s heart cannot hold it all, and it spreads beyond, to the world outside, where pain is. Of its own joy must it give to those who have none——”

“To give to those who have none!” Surely happiness was for all that blessed night. But, even as I thought, I remembered the Mayor’s wife. Alas! in all our glad village she was the only one who did not share our happiness. She had declined our invitation, though the Mayor accepted. I had not seen her to speak to since the day of the fateful interview, and the thought of her alone, bereft of her son, was not to be borne.

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Already our guests were gathering. The court echoed with their merry laughter and greetings. There was not a moment to be lost. Pushing my feet into Alwyn's wooden sabots, and throwing a large cape over my white dress, I softly opened the side door and stole out.

The snow fell heavily. Skirting the garden, I made my way across the *potager* to the gate behind Isidore's house which opened on the street. The night was still and intensely black. Only the crimson gleam from cottage windows lit my way as I hurried along. The cold bit my face and bare fingers; the snow powdered my hair.

But it was not far. I reached the gate to the great central yard, sped across the white carpet, and paused by the uncurtained window. I could see the interior distinctly. By a small fire sat the object of my quest alone, hands, from which knitting had fallen, idle in her lap. Her eyes were fixed on the dying embers. She was off guard, and on the hard face loneliness and bitterness were written in every line.

Softly I opened the door, crept into the passage, and stood hesitating on the threshold, my own temerity for the first time chilling my impulse.

What right had I to thus intrude? Some instinct made her aware of an alien presence in the darkened room. Her head turned, and, as she started to rise, I ran forward, letting fall my cloak, and dropped to my knees before her.

"Dear Madame, forgive me! Pardon me! I am come with a message of peace. We want you with us to-night. Jean, your son, is unhappy to be so parted. He—we all—beg you to come and be glad with us."

She drew her hands from my eager clasp.

"Did anyone tell you to do this thing?" she asked, with a darkening face.

"No one, Madame; but just my wish for peace and good-will."

"They don't want me, my son and that wife of his, any more than I want to remember them."

"But they do. Your boy loves you. His only fault lies in loving another, too, and hearts were made to love many."

"She took him from me. What right had she to rob me of all I had?"

"You might have gained a daughter, and not lost a son."

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"He left me, his mother, for the first pretty face he saw—I who had given him all, for her who had given him nothing."

"Did you not love his father so once, and leave father, mother, and home for him?"

But her mouth closed in obstinate lines. Discouragement filled my quaking breast. Then, kneeling there, holding her worn hands in mine, I spoke swiftly and low, the words hurrying from my heart.

"Dear Madame, once, long ago, in Bethlehem, a mother laid her new-born baby in a manger. She hung above her child, filled with love and tender awe, just as you and I did above our children. He was Incarnate Love. He grew to manhood, loving all, pitying all, forgiving all, even those who sent him to die. His life was one long self-abnegation—His one wish that we, too, should learn the beauty of loving and forgiving. The same stars which shine above us to-night shone on Him two thousand years ago as He lay asleep. Would your own heart not be happier remembering that divine heritage of love?"

She snatched her hands from mine, and covered her face, rocking to and fro, as I knelt in silence.

But no word came. I leaned forward against her knee.

"Your son loves you," I whispered. "He longs for you to-night, the birthnight of the dear Christ. What would He have you do? We are all children in His sight: blundering, mistaken, wrong-headed children, hurting ourselves as we stumble in the dark. Have pity, as He had pity for us all. Take him back to your heart. Forgive——"

Sobs came strangling from behind the hard hands: sobs which were wrenched from depths, shaking the massive frame. I knew the battle was won.

"My boy! My boy!" came the gasping cry.

Rising, I put my arms about her, holding the black head to my breast, soothing, patting, while sobbing words poured from her lips. At last the storm spent itself, and shamefacedly she dried her eyes, as I begged her to hurry and dress to return with me.

She was docile in my hands as I led her from the room, and, calling the maid, took her upstairs to the great, bare room where a giant mahogany bed, hung in white dimity, and horsehair furniture bespoke Spartan virtue and abhorrence of things

frivolous. We seated her before the glass, and I ordered the maid to undo the knob of hair and to puff it about her face in soft waves. I chattered gayly to relieve embarrassment, and soon she, too, awoke to the charm and novelty of effort toward adornment, when she saw her face framed in coquettish locks.

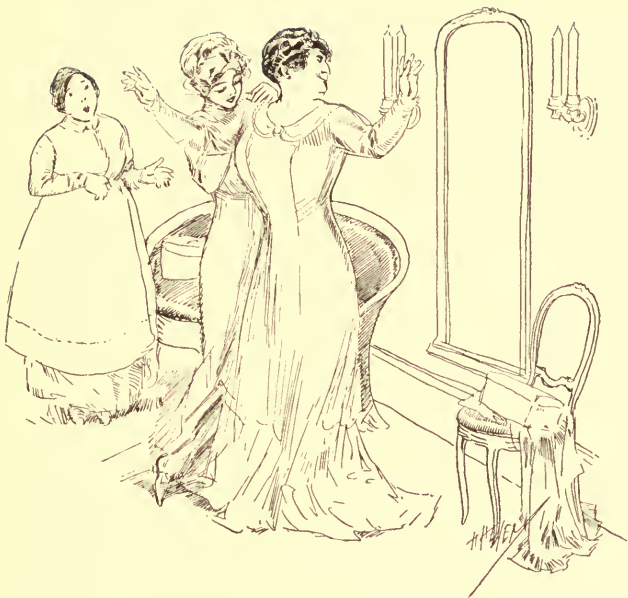
It was she who directed a certain trunk to be opened and a lavender silk, lustrous and rich, to be brought forth—a souvenir of a recent wedding. I shuddered at the glimpse of coarse cotton lingerie, trimmed with “tatting,” and the prunella shoes without heels. As we fastened the corsage about her rotund form she stood back, and gazed critically at her image between the flickering candles on either side of the mirror.

“What was it she said about my waist?” she asked slowly. “She said I should have kept it. But it’s gone, *n’est-ce-pas?*” with a wry smile.

“But not forever,” I replied gayly. “Stop soup, potatoes, and pastry, and with three kilometers a day at a brisk walk—you’ll be a sylph.”

She turned from side to side before the mirror.

“Soup, potatoes, and pastry,” she repeated



“‘What was it she said about my waist?’ she asked slowly.”

slowly, adding: “Finette, have you any face powder?”

The maid stared in astonishment.

“But, of course, Madame!”

“Then stop gaping, and run and get it.”

Finette returned, and I had the pleasure of dusting that Roman nose with my own hands with that beautifying cosmetic.

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At last the momentous toilette was completed, and she stood transformed—a handsome woman. The “eternal feminine” made itself evident, as she cast a farewell glance at herself, saying:

“She can’t say now I look like the Ten Commandments dressed in black bombazine!”

We found the château ablaze with lights and swarming with merrymakers. We slipped in by the side door, and, bidding her wait there, I went in search of Jean, and sent him to his mother. What transpired will never be known, but Jean and Henriette acted as her bodyguard the rest of the evening, all three faces beaming with happiness. It may be noted that the Mayor stared at his transformed spouse in open-eyed amazement, and that Madame Philon saw but little of him.

At five the orchestra from Manteuil struck into the “Marseillaise,” and then, through the long corridor, two and two, came the children: forty-two of them, singing their Christmas carol. The sweet, childish voices rang up to the vaulted ceiling and through the old house like a call to joy. Alwyn, with Marianne’s hand in his, led the procession, head up, eyes searching mine. Behind the children came the Mayor and his wife, the school-

master and his wife, all the familiar faces bright with happiness. At last they reached the salon, where, towering to the ceiling, blazed the tree, magnificently laden with gifts.

The Mayor then stepped forward and in a graceful little speech thanked us for their pleasure, and paid each such charming compliments as filled our elated breasts with vain-glory. Three cheers followed, while the music added to the babble of happy voices.

Then presents were distributed amid exclamations and laughter, followed by hot punch. Games followed. Oh! those games! We were children together, dignity thrown to the winds. We started with "follow-my-leader" all over the house, the Mayor and I leading. Such antics! To this day I blush for the delirious dance I led old and young, from garret to cellar, whirling through rooms and through the maze of corridors, twisting, turning, screaming with laughter.

Then followed dancing. The great white room became a whirl of spinning figures, bobbing about with true French disregard for time or space. Mothers danced with children; old men with maids. The school-master whirled past with Hil-

degarde, his coat-tails sticking out at right angles. I found myself in Ashburne's arms, conscious of nothing for the moment but his strong embrace and a dazzle of movement and color. I felt myself being carried into paradise on waves of melody, and did not wake to reality until almost knocked into insensibility by Isidore, who was gyrating like a demon on a hot platter with Madame Philon. We laughed and drew aside into the embrasure of the window, as we heard the Mayor's stentorious voice call above the din: "All hands round!"

In a moment we were carried into the great circle hand-in-hand. Round and round we whirled: faster, ever faster, stumbling and running, while the lights in the chandelier danced in unison. Once we caught a glimpse of the Mayoress, perspiring, disheveled, but joyous, clutching tightly to Jean's hand as we spun by in the dizzy whirl. Then the orchestra stopped with a crash, and we stood gasping.

But all good things come to an end, and good-nights were said at last. It was then that the dear old *Curé* stepped forward before the great fireplace and, raising both hands, asked for silence.

We all stood hushed, as, with his faded blue eyes raised, and his white head a delicate silhouette against the dancing flames, he "blessed the House." It was a quaint and touching ceremony, and, as everyone echoed his low "Amen," we felt that the Christ-child's spirit indeed hallowed the place.

When the last guest had gone, Margaret and Lillian disappeared, leaving the Archangel, Ashburne, Alwyn, and me grouped about the fire, discussing the eventful evening. We were all somewhat tired after the frolic, and silent, each inwardly absorbed in an undercurrent of thought. It was Alwyn who kept the conversational ball rolling.

"Italy is where brigands live, isn't it?" he asked the Archangel, who seemed absent-minded, but roused himself to attention.

"Yes, my boy, but not in Rome, where I live. They cling to the mountains, where they can steal with greater safety."

"You never were a brigand?"

"I, a brigand? No, indeed!"

"And you never thought really of stealing, did you?"

"Certainly not. Did you think stealing was my profession?"

Ashburne laughed.

"He evidently supposes you have a dagger up your sleeve, a mask in your pocket, and crime on your soul."

"Not at all, Bud," said Alwyn indignantly. "I'm only puzzled, for the other day I heard Dear say that Mr. Monturbia was going to steal our treasure."

We avoided glancing at each other's embarrassed faces, and then broke into uncontrollable laughter, while my son stared in hurt surprise at our levity. Then the Archangel rose and stood before me, with his hand on Alwyn's head.

"Thank you, *mon cher petit ami*, for making this opportunity," he said gravely. "I do, indeed, wish to steal a treasure—your cousin Lillian." Then, turning to me with simple dignity: "Dear madame, the moment seems propitious. I can wait no longer. You know why I am come from Italy. It is that I may do myself the honor of asking for the hand of mademoiselle, your cousin. Will you, with her guardian's consent, give her to me, if she be willing?"

I looked up into the beautiful face, strong in nobility.

"With all my heart," I said, "and may every blessing and happiness come to you both."

He stooped low over my hand, and kissed it with courtly grace.

"I have no adequate words with which to thank you, madame." Then, turning to Ashburne, with both hands outstretched: "And may I thank you, also? I have been indeed blessed in such a friend."

But Alwyn's voice interrupted these formalities.

"I say!" he exclaimed; "it seems a bit cheeky for you to be giving Cousin Lillian away. She is a grown-up, and may not like it."

I smiled up at the Archangel.

"Don't you think, O happy prince, that you had better ask her?"

"You had just better," warned Alwyn. "She is in the library, picking up pop-corn."

As the Archangel started with alacrity for the door, Alwyn called to him: "Can you get on all right without me?"

"Thanks, *caro*, I wouldn't disturb you for the

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world. You may feel sure that I will make her understand."

The door closed, and Alwyn climbed to my knee, leaning his head against my shoulder. He seemed physically tired, but evidently mentally alert. No one spoke. We watched the leaping flames, while candles died to darkness. It was still and warm. Whirling snow-flakes filled the window spaces, clinging to the glass in grotesque traceries. Ashburne leaned his tall frame against the high *cheminée*, shading his eyes with his hand.

"It is good to be here," he said quietly. "It is like coming home."

"We did miss you awfully, didn't we, Dear?" said Alwyn.

"Yes!" said I.

"Did you really, both of you?" asked Ashburne.

"Well, rather! Dear even more than me. Every night before I said my prayers, when she held me, she used to say: 'Now, let us talk about the Knight of the Strong Heart,' for that was what she always called you, you know. And then she would tell me bully stories about your adventures: how you had rescued a Fair Lady from a dungeon called the Prison of Self, and how the

Fair Lady wept when the Knight rode away to the wars. It was all so truly true that she really cried. I felt her tears on my hair, all wet and mussy."

I sat silent, hiding crimson cheeks where those tears had fallen. Ashburne stirred.

"Did she never tell you why the Knight rode away?" he asked.

"No! she left that out of the story."

"Well, you see, the Knight found out that the Fair Lady didn't care so much about him, or, if she did, she didn't know how much. So the Knight said to himself: 'I will go away, and perhaps she will come to miss me a little. I will give her plenty of time to sit quite alone in her high tower; to remember all I told her, and how dearly I love her. Then she may miss my worship; feel pity for me, who find the wide world a dreary place without her. Then, when I return, she may give me welcome, and bid me enter, that neither may be alone any more.' "

"Of course the Lady was polite, and invited him in?" said Alwyn.

"I do not know. Perhaps your Dear will finish the story."

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"Did he, Dear?"

"Yes!" said I softly.

"And she was never shut up in the Prison of Self again?"

"No! Never again," said I.

"And so they were married," said Ashburne gravely, "and lived happily forever after. Now, old chap, don't you think your supper is ready? Hadn't you better run and see?"

"Right, Bud! I'm just as hungry as though I hadn't eaten four gingerbread elephants and three bags of candies. Hildegarde says I'm the Bottomless Pit."

He slipped from my knee and ran from the room. We heard his light footfall along the distant corridor. Then all was silent, save leaping flames and the beating of my happy heart.

"Dear!" he whispered. I looked up. The Knight of the Strong Heart was standing before me with outstretched arms.

P. S.—The Editor suggests that I should bid my kind readers a more formal *adieu*. What can I add, save the wish that some day we may meet again in the House of the Seven Gabblers. For now it is our own, and Margaret and the Toranos spend happy weeks with us here, forgetting the world which holds us all by many interests. If you chance to find yourselves in this corner of sunny France, knock at our portals, and you will be made welcome. As Isidore says, “a hospitable house allows no grass to grow in its court-yard.” And so, *au revoir!*

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